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Delective Fleece, of London.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.



THEN, ON TIPTOE, HE ADVANCED TO THE DESK, AND CAUTIOUSLY DREW FORTH THE PARCHMENT.

Detective Fleet of London;

OR,

Unmasking the Conspirators.

A Story of Philadelphia and London.

BY A. P. MORRIS, JR.,

AUTHOR OF "BIG DAN'S PROTEGEE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOVERS.

MANY years ago there was situated prominently on the Germantown road, a short distance beyond the city limits of Philadelphia, a magnificent residence built after the imposing style of a French chateau. It was surrounded on three sides by beautifully-ornamented grounds, and broad, grassy lawns, wherein stood immense shade-trees, at various points, underseated with iron benches; and at the rear were well-graded terraces, rendered gorgeous with innumerable plants and flowers that lent an almost cloying perfume to the summer breezes. From the road to the house was a graveled drive, dotted on either side with beds of rarest roses, and shrubs of gaudy bloom. The piazza, at the front, was wreathed in vine-clad trellis-work; while through and through the molded eaves twined, in attractive, drooping fashion, the golden-leaved ivy.

It was here that Calvert Herndon, a retired merchant of reputed wealth, had settled down to the luxury and ease well-earned by years of toil. He was a widower. A dearly-loved wife had been laid to rest long before the period in which our story opens; but a daughter, just merging into perfect womanhood, remained to him, to cheer and soothe him in his declining years.

It was a summer day of exceeding splendor.

In the very center of a flower-bed, culling choice buds from among a host of red, yellow and crimson roses, stood a maiden of rare and lustrous beauty.

Her slender hands were busy with fragrant buds, and as she stooped to pluck the last gul from off its stem, she uttered a pleased exclamation, and held the result of her labors out at arm's length to contemplate it.

"There! isn't that a beauty? I promised Victor that, when he came this morning, I'd have the prettiest collection ready for him his eyes ever beheld. Now, then, only a little more evergreen, and a leaf or two of fern, and I'll have my bouquet completed. But what time is it, I wonder?" (Drawing from her belt a small medallion watch, and glancing at the dial.) "Why, I do say! it's nearly half-past ten. And Victor said he was coming about eleven. I must make haste," and she proceeded to put the finishing-touch to her light task.

Ere the fern-leaves were adjusted, however, a footstep sounded upon the path, and Victor Hassan, he of whom she had spoken in her self-commune, appeared before her.

"Good morning, Pauline, my dove," he said, stretching forth both hands. In a moment she was in his arms, while a fervent kiss passed between them.

"I've come, my darling, upon the errand I promised. Is your father in?"

"Yes. I left him in the parlor not more than an hour ago. You'll find him there, I guess."

"And having found him, pet, when I leave him, the destiny of my whole future will be decided."

"Mine, too, Victor," she added, nestling her head confidently on his breast. "If he refuses to grant your request for my hand in marriage, I—I'll—I am sure I shall die."

"Oh, no—not that, I hope. But don't despond. Wait until I see him. He could refuse me for no other reason than that my salary is barely sufficient to support me. Even that will not count, for I expect soon to be advanced in my position, and therefore I shall be perfectly independent while my health and strength last. Here goes, at all events; I can *only* fail," releasing himself and starting toward the house as he spoke.

"Oh! may Heaven grant he will not refuse you, dear Victor!" murmured Pauline.

Her lover cast back a smile of encouragement and continued on, while she, in trepidation of mind, sought the fragrant shadows of an arbor, and awaited his return with painful anxiety.

Slowly the moments passed. Fifteen—twenty minutes—and still she sat there, waiting for her lover, and the good or bad news he was to bring. The suspense grew torturous.

At last he came, still bearing in his hand the bouquet she had given him, and his handsome features—handsome because they indicated a refined intellect and noble soul—wore an expression that betokened naught of discouragement to her eager heart.

"The answer, Victor? The answer?" she cried, starting forward, and throwing her arms about his neck. "Tell me quick—is it life, or is it death?"

"Life, dearest!" he replied, in happy voice. "Look up. Don't become so excited."

"What did he say, Victor?" she continued, joyously.

"Come, Pauline, be seated, and I will tell you in a few words."

When they were seated in the perfumed bower from which she had run to meet him, he said:

"I went to your father, and without hesitancy or parley, plainly told him of our love. I told him how we had learned to live in each other's affection with a fondness that would render a blight of our hopes next to, and more painful than, death. I made him aware of how this love had sprung up—how, since the night we met in the crowded ball-room, we knew the same star of destiny illumined our paths. He listened attentively until I had concluded, and then, very naturally, it was his turn to speak, to ask questions."

"Oh, Victor! and what did he say? Was he angry, or unpleasant in any way?"

"Not at all. He exhibited the politeness of a gentleman, and the solicitude of a parent. He asked me if I was secure enough in my position to warrant my marrying, and if my salary was sufficient for all expenses."

"And you said—"

"I said yes. In addition, I mentioned that I expected shortly to be even better situated. He seemed satisfied, but at the same time reminded me that there was another suitor."

"Ah!"

Pauline's gaze drooped to the grassy carpet.

"There was another suitor, my love; yet, you were at liberty to choose for yourself."

"Did he say that? Oh! are you sure?"

"Yes."

"That other suitor is our guest—Hallison Blair, I suppose?"

This with a slight shudder.

"The same. Your father told me so."

"I have suspected for a long time that he loves me; or, rather, professes to that end," and her face was upturned to his as he pressed her to him, and said, interrogatively:

"But you will not be at a loss to make the choice?"

"No, Victor, no! *You* are the only one on this earth whom I love besides pa. I am yours alone."

"God bless you, pet! and may I never, by word or action, give you cause to repent the holy trust you have placed in me by those words. The splendor of this day is but a reflection of the light that fills my heart since I know that you are mine till death. I never knew real happiness until this moment, for I realize a bliss intended to last forever in this life."

With what unusual swiftness the minutes fled by unheeded, as the lovers sat there, whispering anew their mutual troth!

It was high noon when Victor first awoke from the sweet dream in which they were wrapt, and starting up, he exclaimed:

"Why, really, I had no idea it could be so late!"

Pauline consulted her watch. Quarter to twelve was the time.

"Are you going now, Victor?"

"Yes, I must be off. I'll return again this evening. By-by, darling."

One more embrace, a warm kiss, and he left her.

He had scarce taken a dozen steps, when Pauline detected the approach of some one from the opposite side of the arbor; and, turning quickly, discovered Calvert Herndon's guest—Hallison Blair.

This man was an Englishman, though strikingly dark in features, and with mustache and goatee of jet-black. His eyes were of a brownish color, brilliant and fascinating. In figure, he was handsome, rather slender, and, in all, not one to prove disagreeable in the sight of those who admire exquisite taste and display.

Pauline looked after her retreating lover, half-persuaded to call him back; then at the one who was coming toward her, and with a creeping, inexplicable feeling sunk down upon the bench from which she had arisen.

When he drew nigh, his dark eyes sparkled with a subtle brightness, his white, regular teeth were visible as he smiled in his bland manner, and said:

"Ah! Miss Herndon, you are alone, I perceive? I have been waiting quite a little while for an opportunity to speak with you privately," he continued, seating himself near her, "but Mr. Hassan seems to have enjoyed the exclusive monopoly of your society."

Pauline drew back from him.

"You seem afraid of me. Am I ugly or repulsive?"

"Oh, no," was her brief answer.

"As I said, I have waited patiently for this opportunity. I desired to speak with you alone, upon a subject that has long reigned uppermost in my thoughts. Can you not guess what it is?"

His gaze was lost upon her, for she kept her eyes upon the green flower-stems with which she toyed, and returned, simply:

"How should I?"

CHAPTER II.

A PROMPT REPLY.

"How should you?" he repeated. "You are a woman, Miss Herndon, with a woman's quick perception, and aptitude at learning by one's actions, the motive which governs them. Can you, then, say you have been, and are wholly blind to my feelings, which I must have betrayed ere this?"

Hitherto, he had been content, apparently, with feasting his eyes upon her beauty, and hearkening to the sweet tone of her voice, and this had afforded her a blessed respite, considering she lived in constant fear of his approaches. But now, the handsome Hallison Blair was touching closely upon the subject of his affection, and gradually approaching a positive declaration. Her eyes raised not to meet his. She knew the subtle power of their brilliancy; for, on more than one occasion she had been momentarily transfixed beneath his fascinating gaze, and at these times an involuntary chill crept over her. He drew nearer and pursued:

"I would have returned to my home in England, many months ago, but for the retaining charm of which I speak. There has been a magnet, as it were, which held me fast as a responsive needle." His voice was low, gentle.

She remained silent—mustering her energies for an abrupt refusal, when he should plainly ask her hand.

"Miss Herndon—Pauline, I—"

"Sir!"

"Forgive me. I must call you by that name. I am too wild to refrain from uttering it. Pauline Herndon, I love you, idolize you. Beyond the sea I have a gorgeous home, surrounded by wealth and luxury, in which you shall reign as my queen, with every thing you can wish for to make you happy. I will worship you—hasten to accomplish your slightest desire, do all in my power to render your existence a pleasant pastime. Your wants shall be my pleasure; your contentment my chiefest aim. Speak but one word; say that you can love me, will be my cherished wife, and I am satisfied to yield up ten years of my life. Will you be mine?"

He had taken her hand in his own, pressing it tightly, bending over to gaze into her lovely face; and his ardent syllables were softly whispered to her unwilling ear.

With a quick motion she released herself, and started up. She had nerved herself for this, and replied emphatically, while the blood mantled to her temples.

"Mr. Blair, I not only decline your offer of marriage, but give you to understand that I am already engaged. Even if I were not the betrothed of another, my answer would be the same. I do not like you. I hope this is definite enough," and she turned to go.

"Stop!" hurriedly spoke Blair, placing himself directly in her path, while his dark eyes fairly scintillated with anger, and his utterance seemed choked. "You wholly reject my suit?"

"I have given my answer."

"And this penniless boy, this Victor Hassan, whom I just now saw leave you, is your accepted lover?"

"As you took the pains to watch our movements," she retorted without reserve, noting his rise of anger, "perhaps I might be right in drawing the inference that you also played eavesdropper. If so, I hope you were entertained pleasantly with our conversation."

"I repeat—he is the fortunate suitor?"

"I do not deny it. I am proud in his love."

"Are you aware that your father favors me?"

"Not more so than he does Mr. Hassan. In fact, permit me to state, my father has privileged me to choose my own husband; my choice rests with Mr. Hassan."

"He is a conceited fop."

"A man who does not possess a rational amount of conceit, lacks one of the essential attributes of true manhood, Mr. Blair. But I think, sir, you are forgetting your education as a gentleman. Such language concerning Mr. Hassan, is an insult to me."

He reddened the more, and persisted: "You had best reconsider your answer, Miss Pauline."

"The answer I have given must suffice for all time. Have the kindness to let me pass."

"Oh, certainly; I shall not detain you longer against your will. But I have this to say: I promise you, Pauline Herndon, that if power on earth can accomplish it, you shall yet be my wife!"

The calmness of this final speech contained a terrible significance to her; but he stepped aside, bowing courteously and she swept past him to the house.

Pauline, when she entered the house, immediately sought her father. He was in the front parlor, and, going to his side, she knelt down by him, resting her head upon his knee, and sobbed audibly.

"Why, my little bird, what do you cry for?" he inquired, tenderly resting a hand upon her wavy tresses.

"Oh, pa, I am so happy!—and still so miserable!"

"Happy and miserable in the same moment!" he exclaimed, an indulging smile about the corners of his mouth—a mouth from which had come soft lullabys and nonsense to amuse the caroling babe, who now was grown to appreciate his early kindness, and be a sole and cheering light to his life.

"Impossible, my child! People do not feel happy and miserable at once. It must be some rare cause," and he laughed lightly.

"But, pa," she said, looking up at him through her tears, "it is so with me. I am joyous as a thoughtless bird, in the knowledge that you have permitted me to choose Victor for a husband. I love him dearly."

"You have decided upon that point, then?" he interrupted, playfully.

"Yes—yes. I did not hesitate when he told me your answer to him."

"Then, that is settled. I hope you may both be very happy."

"Then, pa, you were more in favor of him than Mr. Hal—Hallison Blair?"

"Undoubtedly so, my daughter. Though Mr. Blair comes from a family who ranked high in England. His father was an Earl. I first made his acquaintance some eight years ago, while your mother and I were traveling in Europe—you were at boarding-school at the time—and I opined you might, perhaps, prefer the title of Lady Hallison Blair to plain Mrs. Victor Hassan."

"Title!—Lady Hallison Blair! What can you mean, pa?"

"I have never mentioned the fact to you, my little Pauline, nor has he, I judge. He is an English nobleman, inheriting the lordly title from his father."

"This is really news to me."

"I presume so. But it will make no difference. I guess you and Victor will love one another as fondly as if he boasted high lineage."

"More so, pa. I could never love Mr. Blair."

"You know your own heart best. I have always held to the determination of letting you select for yourself when you became of proper age. I told Mr. Hallison Blair—as he is known here—that, if he could persuade you to love him, he had my consent to the marriage. I am thoroughly satisfied as it is. Mr. Hassan I esteem highly, and when I questioned him regarding his capability of supporting a wife, it meant nothing. All I possess shall go to make you happy."

"Oh, pa, you are so kind!"

"And now, puss, what is your miserable portion?"

Again the pretty head was nestled on his knee, and fresh tears dimmed the luster of her eyes.

"Mr. Blair has spoken to me of his love only a few minutes since."

"Yes? Then you told him of your premier engagement, and of course it ended there."

"No, pa, it did not end there. He persisted, even after I told him that Victor possessed my heart and promise."

"He importuned you after that?"

"Yes. He stood before me and pressed his suit till the sound of his voice became tiresome. And his eyes, pa—they looked strange."

"Was he impertinent, Pauline?" and Calvert Herndon's brow darkened.

"Not impertinent; but, oh! he said some thing that fixes itself strangely upon my mind as a dread omen."

"What was his speech?"

"He said that 'if power on earth could accomplish it, I should yet be his wife.'"

"What! He said that, and you tell me he was not impertinent? What could be his meaning? I will seek him, and demand immediate explanation!"

"No, no," pleaded Pauline, clinging to him, as he started up to carry out his intention, "don't go. Let it pass. He could have meant nothing. Perhaps he spoke hastily, before he could check the sentence which was called to his lips upon the sudden realization that I had rejected him. Let it pass; please do, for my sake."

He sunk back into his chair, with the inquiry:

"What more did he say?"

"He spoke of Victor as a fop—a man unfitted to be my husband," answered Pauline, hesitatingly, for she saw that her father was considerably agitated at this account of his guest's behavior.

"And if Victor knew this," exclaimed the old gentleman, "I'll wager that he'd cowhide Mr. Blair, in default of satisfactory apology!"

"It shall be my endeavor to keep it from Victor, and I want you to do the same, pa. I don't think Mr. Blair will forget himself a second time."

"Very well; I will be content to pass it by, for your sake, my little Pauline. But if anything like it occurs again, I shall take immediate steps to inform him that his further presence is distasteful to me. Maybe I'll go beyond that."

At this juncture the door-bell tingled, and presently a servant entered, bearing a card upon a salver.

Glancing at the name, Herndon read, "Gulick Brandt, M. D.," and instantly ordered that the visitor be admitted.

"Excuse me for a little while, my child," he said, assisting her to rise. "I desire a private interview with the doctor."

Pauline withdrew, passing the comer in the hall, who bowed upon seeing her, and in a few seconds Doctor Gulick Brandt entered the parlor, where Herndon, remaining seated, awaited him.

"Ah! good-day, Mr. Herndon," said the physician; "I hope I find you well."

"Quite well, thank you. I have been wishing to see you for several days past. You have kept yourself rather aloof from us lately."

"That's a fact," returned Brandt. "I admit I have neglected to call with my accustomed regularity. But, you see, there's been some extraordinary cases of fever demanding my attention, and I've been unable to get around. You look well," he said, drawing a long breath.

"I accept your excuse; wait, doctor; you may think it queer that I did not ask you to be seated when you came in. I desire to speak with you privately. Let us go to the library."

Doctor Brandt followed the merchant from the room, though a lack of promptness was plainly noticeable in his steps, and he appeared to be somewhat uneasy, glancing at Herndon closely.

CHAPTER III

THE TELLTALE NOTE.

DOCTOR GULICK BRANDT was a rather short, stout personage, with broad shoulders, light blue eyes, florid complexion, and head very nearly bald.

His acquaintance with the Herndon family was of long standing, he having filled the office of their regular physician for several years.

Calvert Herndon had first taken a liking to him on account of his brief, concise manner of transacting business, and conversation; and from an ordinary acquaintance there had sprung up an intimate personal friendship.

The merchant had oftentimes consulted with him, when in receipt of solicitations to invest in private speculation, after retiring from business, and invariably found in his advice solid sense and sterling whys and wherefores.

On this occasion, however, Herndon seemed moodily thoughtful, and Brandt missed the cordiality with which he was wont to be received at the home mansion.

When they reached the library, the doctor was motioned to a seat, and the merchant advanced to a desk, from a drawer of which he took a roll of parchment. This he placed upon the table, and drawing up a chair, said, while untying the tape around it:

"You have seen this before, Doctor Brandt?"

"Yes; I should think so. It's your will, I believe. I am one of the witnesses."

"More than that, I had selected you as my executor."

"Indeed? You surprise me!"

"I say I had selected you," continued Herndon, laying marked emphasis on his speech. "I have since altered my mind," and with this he quickly tore the will into a hundred pieces, casting them in a shower upon the floor.

The doctor had started forward to prevent the act of mutilation, but checked himself and asked:

"What is that for?"

"Because, sir, you are a villain."

"Sir!"

The two men were upon their feet; each looked sternly upon the other; a collision seemed imminent. Gazing thus in silence, for a second only, Herndon resumed his seat, saying, briefly:

"Sit down, sir."

Brandt did as requested, but steadfastly returned the hard, sharp, searching glance of the merchant, and waited for an explanation.

"Doctor Brandt, I said you were a villain; you wish me to explain?"

"As a gentleman, and your equal, I demand that at once."

"Very well; you shall have it. Wait. It has not been until very recently that my eyes have been opened to the mock garb of piety and friendship which you have worn in my presence; and in the discovery made, so unexpectedly, I see you as you really are—a hypocritical scoundrel; double-faced rascal!"

"Mr. Herndon, I cannot tolerate this; I am astonished; I—"

"Stop. You want an explanation of why I think you a villain. Now I am going to

give it you. When you visited me the other day you apprised me of a scheme in the business market, in which money could be invested to an almost certain guarantee of netting, in the returns, over one hundred per cent. profit. It was something new; had originated in a circle composed of some of the leading commission merchants of Philadelphia. As I had done on many similar occasions before, I asked your advice in the matter, and, though I failed to note it then, I distinctly remember now, you betrayed an extraordinary pleasure that I again solicited your counsel. You advised me to enter; still, you wanted a short time to consider, to look into the matter, and you would give me a definite opinion. This was on last Monday. On Tuesday last I stepped in at the United States Hotel to see an old friend of mine, who had just arrived from New York. The coach was departing at the moment for the Boston train, and, as the last passenger took his seat, he drew his handkerchief from his pocket. In doing so, something fell to the pavement. I saw it; I immediately picked it up; I called to him; he did not hear me, and in a few seconds the lumbering coach whirled beyond hailing distance. He had lost a letter; I had found it. It was directed to one Hank Hawkens, of Boston. The chi-rography struck me as familiar, but I gave no second thought to it, placing the lost article in my pocket, and intending to forward an advertisement to some Boston paper as soon as I left the hotel.

"Seeking my friend, we seated ourselves for a cozy chat. After a while I spoke of the incident, and what had come into my possession. Very naturally, he asked me to let him look at it. I did so. He no sooner saw the name on the envelope than he uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Why," said he, "this is directed to one of the most notorious swindlers that ever disgraced, by presence, the good city of Boston. I know his reputation well. He is a pardoned counterfeiter; lives now by playing the sharp game. Let's examine the contents."

"I endeavored to dissuade him from this; he declared there could be no harm, considering *who* it belonged to—a scoundrel of the first water—and, as he extracted and perused the letter, he read aloud while I listened. Doctor Brandt, my heart was wrung. My friend's astonishment was unbounded. I have that letter with me. You shall hear it."

He produced the epistle from an inner pocket, and read aloud as follows:

"PHILADELPHIA, June —, 18—.

"HANK HAWKENS, Esq.:

"SIR:—I write to state that, knowing you will be in town shortly, through a mutual friend, I am situated in such a way as to be able to place a neat few thousand or so in your pocket. Being tolerably acquainted with your habits, I do not hesitate in making the following offer: I am intimate with one Herndon, who resides on the Germantown road, just beyond Philadelphia (this city)—a wealthy gentleman, with whom I sway considerable influence, and who would readily act upon my advice, if I would propose his investing several thousands in a rare scheme. You understand. If you will pledge me one half and silence, I can persuade him to advance a sum of money to you, by representing you as president of the *new ring*. Please answer, stating at what hour, and where, I can meet you on Saturday evening next."

"Is this familiar to you?" questioned Herndon, when he had concluded.

"No, sir, it is not. And I do not understand anything satisfactory from what you have said."

"This letter is signed 'G. B.'"

"That counts nothing. It may signify Gun Barrel, Green Bottles, Game Bag, or anything of equal unimportance."

"Yet, I see in the signature, Doctor Gulick Brandt!"

"Do you mean to charge me, Calvert Herndon, with being the author of this letter?" demanded Brandt, his cheeks reddening, paling, either from chagrin or desperate anger, upon recognizing the fact that the merchant was unwavering in his suspicion.

"I do, sir. No doubt you have heard from Hank Hawkens ere this, he agreeing

to your dirty plans, and the express object of your visiting me to-day, Monday, was to advise my entering into this scheme—which is a sham, gotten up with a view to your individual interest, and the gain of this Boston swindler. It is a plan to rob me—rob a friend; nothing less. I know our relative positions now, Doctor Gulick Brandt, and henceforth we are strangers. I have showed you that I know you to be a villain; now leave my house, and never darken door of mine again."

"I shall not go, sir, until you have given me a chance to prove that you are mistaken in this matter," said the physician. "I have held neither epistolary nor verbal communication with any such person as Hank Hawkens, as you call him."

"I think otherwise. I have proof before me," tapping the letter in a conclusive style. "I want no explanation from you whatever. I have had my say, and again I order you to leave my house!"

Brandt's red face grew redder as he returned, unflinchingly, the stern gaze of the merchant.

"I will not go until you hear me," began the former.

"I will not hear you; go!"

Yet, though the owner of the house pointed to the door, Brandt moved not, but said:

"That letter is strange to me—"

"Leave this room, this house, instantly, sir, or I may forget that I am on my own premises. I once more command you, go! If you do not, I may be tempted to lay violent hands upon you. I have been hurt, grieved; now I am angered, dangerous to be trifled with. Will you begone?"

"Strike me if you dare!" cried Brandt, "and you'll rue this day."

He saw that it was useless to remonstrate, and now spoke defiantly.

The words were scarce uttered when Herndon, with an alacrity unusual in one of his years, sprung upon the physician, and struck him several blows in the face.

But he had erred in judging his adversary, for Brandt seized a favorable opportunity, and planted his fist between the other's eyes, with such force as to send him reeling across the apartment.

It would not have ended here but that the door was burst open at this critical juncture, and Pauline bounded into the room.

Doctor Gulick Brandt turned to hurry out and encountered Hallison Blair. The Englishman smiled as he whispered:

"Well done, doctor; you did me a great favor in that."

Calvert Herndon was partially stunned by the blow he had received, but walked to a sofa, sunk down upon it, and Pauline clung to him, beseeching him, in trembling, anxious tones, to tell her if he was much injured.

"No, my child," he replied to her inquiries, "merely a blow that has confused me. The scoundrel matched me well, it seems. Has he taken himself away?"

"Oh, yes, he's gone," answered a voice, and Pauline, turning her head, exclaimed, as she saw the Englishman:

"You here?"

"Why," he remarked, nonchalantly, "I was behind you when you came in here."

"How happened it that you arrived upon the scene, my daughter?" Herndon asked.

"I was passing the library, pa, coming from my room, when I heard angry words between you and Doctor Brandt. I came in as soon as I could turn the knob."

"And I was going to my room," added Hallison Blair, "when I saw Miss Pauline disappear in here, and noticed that her actions were somewhat excited. I arrived opposite the door, only in time to see my dear friend, Mr. Herndon, staggering to the wall. I am dull at comprehension, else I would have collared the physician, who was gone ere I could understand the situation of affairs."

"Well, well," continued the merchant, soon recovering himself entirely, "let the affair drop. He will never enter my house again. There, Pauline, you may go now," (kissing her fair brow). "Think no more of it. I desire to be alone."

As Pauline, in compliance with his re-

quest, went out from the library, she raised her eyes for a moment to those of Hallison Blair. He was gazing at her with intense steadfastness, and a momentary shudder possessed her.

She descended to the lunch-hall, while Blair continued on to his room.

He smiled and chuckled lightly as he closed his door, and muttered:

"Aha! Pauline; I vowed that you should be mine in spite of all the Victor Hassans who may swarm the globe! I meant it; I mean it still! I have now only to unwind the cord, and, with skillful management, will find no knots. You shall yet be mine!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEADLY PASTILLE.

WHEN night set in—a night as beautiful in its starry radiance as had been the glorious days; while the full golden moon poured down her soft rays through foliaged trees and on the sleeping flowers—nine o'clock had come, and Calvert Herndon sat alone in his library wrapt in the perusal of sundry documents, which he took from, and returned to, successively, and alternately, the desk of many pigeon-holes before him.

After awhile, he took up a manuscript that bore a fresher look than the others, and as he read this, an apparent emotion was traced upon his features.

"Ah!" he mused, "who would have dreamed that, in Doctor Brandt, a man I have esteemed and trusted for years, and made my confidant, I would discover so base a hypocrite! I had chosen him my executor, and imagined that my choice was good. Providence has certainly smiled upon me, in unmasking him, ere my little Pauline lived without a father. Had my money and estate once passed into his control, I fear my child would have existed drearily in the cold world. Now, I hurried about the preparation of this last will; have it witnessed correct; and in the event of my death, Pauline and Victor are well provided for. I had foreseen that she loved young Hassan."

He slipped the parchment back into its pigeon-hole, and then leaned upon the arm-rests of his chair, becoming absorbed in reveries. As the moments floated by, his eyelids grew heavy; his head drooped upon his breast; he slept. The house was silent. No sounds were heard in hall or passage. The servants had retired; an ominous stillness prevailed.

Suddenly, in the glimmering gaslight, a face appeared above the sill of the open window. Then followed a pair of shoulders, and a man gazed in.

Assuring himself that the merchant was oblivious to his presence, the intruder swung lightly into the room, and stood motionless, to see if his advent had disturbed Herndon's slumber. Then, on tiptoe, he advanced to the desk, and cautiously drew forth the parchment Herndon had placed there a few minutes before. Placing it in his pocket, he turned, stooped down, and hurriedly gathered up the slips and bits of the mutilated will, which lay where they had been thrown in the morning. These were also placed in his pocket. Pausing for a second, to again make sure he had not been discovered, the intruder went to the merchant's side, and, exercising an art that would have done credit to a practical pickpocket, purloined from the sleeper's person a number of letters. One of these he kept and returned the others to their place.

Another glance at Herndon's face—immobile in its deep repose—and he produced a tiny pastille, fired the pointed cone, and set it upon the desk.

This done, he returned to the window, swung quietly out, catching the bough of a majestic tree which had been the means of his entree and exit, and slid to the ground. The pastille burned; a minute wreath of blue smoke slowly ascended, and soon a fragrant aroma began to fill the apartment. At first, this was pleasant, but as it increased, and the atmosphere grew denser, the inhalation assumed a suffocating odor, which thickened till the senses sickened under it.

Herndon slept on. The pastille burned lower and lower. The cloud of vapor became cloying in its curious smell.

The merchant's respiration sounded heavier as he unconsciously breathed the obnoxious perfume. His face gradually whitened; he moved restlessly.

Suddenly came a twitching of the nerves; the jaw dropped; the breathing ceased.

The pastille now lay in an ashen heap, while its smoke floated slowly toward the window and out upon the pure night air, where it evaporated completely.

The night passed on, as if naught had happened to mar its solitude; and when again the bright sun mounted to the heavens, those who bustled about the grand Home Mansion, dreamed not of the dread discovery that was in store.

Pauline, looking lovely as the morn itself, was seated at one of the long, low vine-clad windows in the parlor, gazing out upon the grass and flowers as they swayed in the mild, scented breeze. Her face was expressive of a silent yearning. Victor Hassan, contrary to her expectations, and his own promises, had not called again to see her on the afternoon of the day previous. Had he forgotten her?

"Pshaw!" she murmured, within herself. "I am foolish. Some unexpected business duty detained him."

Yet, she wished he had come, despite all other pressing engagements.

By and by, her musings fell into another channel. She thought of what had happened between her father and Doctor Brandt; she remembered the angry dialogue, to which she had been a patient listener; and finally, as she reflected the more, she wondered in proportion, as to what had given rise to this abrupt enmity between them. Doctor Brandt, she knew, had always occupied a position of highest esteem, in the eyes of her father; and the affair seemed more than ever strange, owing to the fact that Calvert Herndon had volunteered no explanation of the difficulty.

Her reveries were broken by the sound of a light footfall on the rich carpet, and quickly turning, she was amazed at sight of Hallison Blair, who twirled his glossy mustache between his fingers, smiled blandly, bowing as he remarked:

"You seem to enjoy solitude, Miss Pauline."

"Solitude is, at all times, preferable to the society of those whom we dislike," was her cold rejoinder, resuming her absent study of the spacious grounds.

"You are looking very charming this morning," he continued, not displaying an inclination to notice the hint that his presence was disagreeable; but as she made no return to this, he went on:

"You also portray, in your pretty face, most perfect health. How is Mr. Herndon this morning? I have not had the pleasure of seeing him yet."

"Nor have I," she replied, briefly, not deigning to notice his impudent liberty of speech, which contained a more than simple flattery.

"And this Victor Hassan—I presume he is well? The devil generally takes care of his own."

She started to her feet. Did she dream? How dared he make use of such language, direct such words to her ear?

"Mr. Blair, you have overstepped all limit to gentility! What you can mean by, or expect to accrue from this persistent, ungentlemanly behavior, I am at a loss to imagine. You seem to forget that you are merely a guest within this house, and under obligations for the hospitality shown you. I shall no longer tolerate your impudence. I shall speak to my father, and have him order you to leave immediately! Let me pass."

"Nay, do not tear yourself away so hastily!" he interrupted, in tones of mock pleading, and stretching forth an arm to detain her. "I desire to whisper anew my burning love—the passion of my soul, the chiefest hope of my life. It is the sole ambition of my heart to beat in the knowledge that you can love me, and I cannot give you up. Will you listen to me?"

"Let me pass, Mr. Blair," she requested, determinedly. "I will not undergo the trial of another scene like that which transpired in the arbor yesterday. I never can, never will love you; so, you may cease your importunities."

"You are cruel."

"I am just to my position and my conscience."

"You wring my heart purposely."

"If performing my duty toward myself wrings your heart, then you must suffer."

"Pauline, reconsider."

"Never!" she answered, firmly.

The word had scarce left her lips when a commotion was heard upon the stairs in the hall, at the door, and two of her household servants came rushing in, panting, out of breath, each striving, in broken syllables, to speak intelligibly.

"What is the matter?" inquired Pauline, surprisedly, gazing from one to the other.

"Oh! mistress," burst forth simultaneously, "master's dead!"

Pauline paled, but did not understand.

"Dead! Who?" was her hurried question.

"Why, the master—Mr. Herndon—your father, sure."

A sense of dizziness came over her; a haze swept across her vision; the room seemed whirling in a confused vortex.

"Dead!" was the involuntary exclamation. "Impossible! How?"

"Yes, missus, it's true enough. We went into the library to dust up, thinkin', of course, he'd be anywhere else than there just now; but there he was, sure, a-sittin' in his big chair, like a 'ghost, an' we knew he was dead—"

With a pained cry, Pauline sprung past them and bounded up the broad staircase. The two girls, with mouths yawning, and eyes distended in wondering curiosity, ran after her; while the Englishman followed leisurely, twining and mingling his jeweled finger in the exquisitely oiled goatee upon his chin.

When he entered the library, nearly all the servants of the mansion were standing around, gaping and gazing upon the motionless form of the merchant.

Pauline, half-crazed with sudden grief, clung around his neck, and pleaded in vain for a word, a sentence of recognition. But, the ear of Calvert Herndon was deaf, the lips sealed, the heart paralyzed; he heard not, spoke not.

At a command from the Englishman, the room was cleared with the exception of one man, who remained at a sign to that effect, and Blair, with his assistance, lifted the lifeless body and carried it to a bedroom, where they deposited it gently upon a soft couch. Pauline kept close by them, weeping bitterly, and apparently deprived of all self-governing power. Her heart had been rent and torn at once, when she looked upon her father—marked the ashen lips that had given utterance to endearing words only the day before.

It was so sudden, so terrible, so overwhelming, her young spirit was crushed from out the gay apparel of a buoyant existence, and hurled to the earth in deepest despair. It was a transit from the bright, blissful, sunny happiness of life to its extreme opposite—sorrow, anguish, isolation. She was alone.

The serving-man withdrew, leaving her and Hallison Blair sole occupants of the room, besides the statue-like form upon the bed.

The Englishman stood close by her, as if to obtrude upon her sorrow. The pale face of the grief-stricken one was turned upon him, though her voice failed, and the tear-dimmed eyes spoke the beseeching volumes which the tongue refused.

More for policy than consideration for her heartrending woe, he departed, closing the door after him. Descending to the lower hall, Blair ordered the private family carriage, and seated himself, impatiently, to wait.

When the mystified groom drew up the restless grays at the front door, he got inside the conveyance, saying:

"Straight to Philadelphia. Drive to Doctor Brandt's office on Spruce street, below Tenth. Make haste!" and as the horses were whipped up to a quick pace, he sunk back amid the cushions.

A smile of diabolical satisfaction settled upon his handsome countenance; he patted his foot, and muttered inaudibly of what apparently afforded him considerable pleasure and hope.

CHAPTER V.

A SPIDER'S WEB.

DOCTOR BRANDT'S office was at his residence on Spruce street, below Tenth, near Madame Guillon's Academy for Ladies, and in one of those buildings which comprise Portico Row, with basement well suited to a lawyer or a physician; and on one of the shutters of the front basement room was tacked a sign:

"GULICK BRANDT, M. D."

The doctor was in his office, having just returned from his customary morning round of visits to his patients, and a young lad, seated in a corner, watched his employer studiously as the latter stood at the window, thrumming upon the pane, and looking out at the passers-by. While thus mentally absorbed, a carriage drew up before the house which he recognized as being from the Home Mansion.

He frowned at first, but his brow cleared as Hallison Blair stepped out, and he saw that the Englishman was alone. In a moment Blair entered; was greeted cordially; invited to a chair.

"I believe this is the first time you have honored me with a call, Mr. Blair," remarked the physician, as they seated themselves.

"Yes," was the rejoinder. "Do you live here?" leisurely removing his gloves, and taking a survey of the room.

"Well, yes. I rent a sleeping apartment up-stairs, and this office, from the family that occupies the house. Hope you are well to-day?"

"Yes, thank you. Are we alone?"

"Yes, John, leave us—you desire to speak with me privately, Mr. Blair?"

"If you please."

"And, John, if any one comes, have them leave their directions. You can remain outside till I call you."

When they were alone, Hallison Blair fixed himself comfortably, and gazing steadfastly at Brandt, said:

"Pretty—well—done—doctor. You did that little job to excellence—perfection—surely."

The physician looked at him in an incomprehensible way.

"Pretty well done? How pretty well done? What pretty well done? I don't see."

"Hal hal hal! he's dead enough this morning. You've got satisfaction!"

Brandt's eyes opened wider.

"Dead! who? Satisfaction for what? How satisfaction?"

"Hal hal! no one would suspect it but me."

"Suspect? Explain."

"Why, there was quite a commotion at the Home Mansion this morning, when Calvert Herndon was found dead in his library."

"Calvert Herndon dead!" exclaimed the physician, gazing incredulously at the other.

"Of course! I say you carried it out admirably," resumed the Englishman.

"How sudden this is!" continued Brandt, musingly. "I always thought him sound—free from hereditary disease—"

"Pshaw! what use is there in your playing this part? I give you credit for the cunning means you employed to kill him so effectually, and without leaving any traces of the deed."

"Calvert Herndon is dead. You think I murdered him?"

"Precisely; or rather, I know, instead of think it."

"Mr. Blair, you surely dream," but a chill coursed through his veins even as he spoke.

"No, I am wide awake."

"What can you mean? I murder him? Heavens! I quarreled with the man, I know, but I thought no more of him or the affair after I left his house."

"That would hardly be credited by any one," rejoined Blair, decidedly. "It is all clear as day to those who know of your secret quarrel. I happened to witness the deed."

There was a terrible calmness, or dread significance about the closing sentence which penetrated the physician's ear with cutting sharpness, notwithstanding its even utterance.

"You witnessed the act of murder—saw

me do it!" and the face of the speaker was more like that of a ghost than mortal. "Am I asleep or awake? This is a terrible charge! It is a nightmare—I dream. I can prove—"

He was about to say he could prove that he had been in town throughout the whole night; but suddenly remembered that he had returned his horse to the stable shortly before dark, and strolled leisurely about until the doors of the Walnut Street Theater were thrown open, when he went to that place of amusement. When he came home, it was late; the family in the house where he resided had retired; he saw no one; no one saw him; it was impossible to prove otherwise than that he had spent a portion of the night either in Moyamensing, Richmond, or on the Germantown road.

"I do not think you can prove anything, doctor," replied Blair, "for I saw you poison Calvert Herndon by means of a pastille of deadly odor. I have but to swear to that in court, couple the testimony of those who know of your late quarrel with the deceased, and it strikes me you will either swing or serve out the balance of your life in the Penitentiary. Ha! ha! ha! you've made a miss and a hit at the same time—a hit in murdering your enemy, thus satisfying your insulted honor; and you made a miss of it in permitting me to see your every action. I don't see how you could well help it, however; of course you were not aware of my proximity."

The physician seemed deprived of power to articulate, remaining speechless and aghast. Blair continued:

"As I said, though, nobody suspects. I am the only one who could get you into a deuced embarrassing difficulty. Now, I am not anxious to do anything of that kind."

"But, Mr. Blair, I am innocent."

"Stuff! How far would your unbacked oath go in a court of law, with overwhelming evidence opposed? Don't you see you are in a tight place?"

Gulick Brandt hung his head with a groan.

Here was a web woven around him, so tangled, mazy, intricate, that he could not extricate himself. He acknowledged, inwardly, his scheme to obtain the money from Herndon, with the aid of Hawken, the swindler, and had experienced all the natural chagrin at his defeat, and expulsion from the premises of a man whose confidant he had been for years. But, when charged with murder, it was a new and terrible phase! He trembled as he realized how utterly powerless he was to establish his innocence; that he was liable to the public ignominy of imprisonment—perhaps execution upon the gallows; and his freedom or bondage, life or death, was balanced on a scale in the hands of Hallison Blair.

The Englishman did not interrupt these thoughts. He was sufficiently versed to read, in part, what occupied the physician's mind, and while he watched the latter closely, a subtle smile, half sneering, half sardonic, yet expressive of triumph, wreathed the corners of his mouth. He held a power over Gulick Brandt. He had come there to make known that power, and to use it.

"Do you realize the peril of your situation?" Blair asked, as the wretched man looked up.

"Yes," was the broken reply. "Considering all you have said, I realize that I am utterly in your power. My life actually trembles in your keeping. But I am innocent—I swear it!"

"Hardly," was the malicious rejoinder, spoken with the air of one who feels a satisfaction in having surmounted the first difficulty in the path toward a desired accomplishment. Then he added, with emphasis: "You are in my power, Gulick Brandt, but you are safe enough as long as we can work harmoniously together. My visit was for another object besides showing you that I am fully aware of your guilt."

For answer, Brandt vented a groaning sigh.

"I was a listener to all that passed between you and Herndon, yesterday. And, by the by, that letter he had in his pocket, which you wrote to Mr. Hawken, of Boston, would have considerable weight against you, if

placed in the hands of a smart lawyer. Fortunately for you, I have it."

"Ah! you have?"

"Yes, safe enough. So you need apprehend no danger on that score—except through me. Now, doctor, Herndon had intended to name you as his executor. He tore up the will to that effect before your eyes."

"I was sorry for that."

"Certainly you were! But that matters nothing; you can still handle the Herndon estate if you are so minded."

"How?"

"Oh, I can manage it easily. Come, now, I make you this proposition: I will guarantee your being Calvert Herndon's executor; to have full charge of all that he leaves; promise to keep secret the fact of your having poisoned him with a pastille; in consideration of which you are to sustain and aid in everything I may see fit to do."

"I do not understand," said Brandt.

"Then I will explain. I love Pauline Herndon with a passion next to idolatry. She loathes me. I am determined she shall be my wife. Aid me in this all you can—I ask nothing more—and I will make good the guarantee I have spoken."

Brandt reflected a moment, and then agreed to the proposition. He could not do otherwise. The alternative would be attended with fearful consequences.

"Very good," said Blair, when the other made answer. "Now, come. We'll go to the Home Mansion. You can decide upon Herndon's death as one from heart disease, and so report to the Board of Health. Come."

They left the office and seated themselves in the carriage, when, in obedience to instructions, the groom turned the horses' heads homeward. As they rolled along, the two discussed at length their alliance—an alliance forced upon the physician by stern fate, in which the dark shadow was Hallison Blair.

That Calvert Herndon might have died suddenly did not seem beyond the confines of probability; still it were strange, as no hereditary disease was known to exist in the family.

But the most crushing consciousness to the mind of Gulick Brandt was that he was stared in the face with a charge of murder!

He was mystified, as well as startled; he wondered how it was possible to implicate him in the occurrence.

Whatever were his thoughts, it was apparent to him that, despite all accusations to the contrary, he could be proven guilty, not withstanding *he was innocent!* No use was there to struggle, to combat the fated coil; he yielded to the dictates of one who now ruled with a power which his own knowledge of men told him was the power of fate.

In due time they arrived at the Home Mansion, and Blair immediately conducted the physician to the room in which lay Calvert Herndon.

Contrary to the Englishman's expectations, Pauline was not there. A servant, who lingered in the darkened apartment, informed him that she had retired to her boudoir and solitude.

"It is as well," he thought, stepping aside as Doctor Brandt bent over the motionless form upon the bed.

He had scarcely glanced at the apparently lifeless body, when he turned quickly and whispered:

"Why, *he is not dead!*"

"Sh!" admonished Blair, noting that the servant was eagerly alert to catch their conversation; "he might as well be. A word from you will be sufficient to make everything straight. No one but a medical practitioner could detect a spark of life in that cold form."

"Bury him alive!" exclaimed Brandt, instantly comprehending the other's meaning, though speaking still guardedly.

"Why not? What does it amount to? Nothing. You speak the word, and he is out of your path. The way is open for you to control great wealth. Why need you hesitate? Ah! it is too late now to think of resuscitating him. I would not permit it, and, in case of an effort in that direction, I

would at once set the law-hounds upon your track."

The physician turned from him with a shudder. Should he obey the Englishman's command? Ah, he dreaded the exposure threatened, and he feared the glitter of those deep, dark eyes as they fixed upon him, as the bird fears the glitter of the steel-like gleam of the deadly serpent. Yes, he intensely feared the man!

"I see all plainly," he said, aloud. "Mr. Herndon has died of heart disease. A sad case—very sad. Where did you say your mistress was?"

This question to the sewing-girl, whose eyes were dimmed with tears of sorrow at loss of a beloved master.

"In her room, sir."

"Send her to me, in the parlor," ordered the physician, in a calm, grave voice. "I must, as is my duty, offer her consolation in this sorrowful moment."

The girl departed, and, no doubt, took opportunity on the way to communicate with her companions in the household, telling them what Doctor Brandt had said.

Hallison Blair smiled approvingly upon the physician.

"Well done, doctor—very cleverly spoken. Each a prize if you maintain well your part! Remember, I watch and wait!"

Then an unbroken silence reigned.

"I told her, sir," said the domestic, entering the room after a few moments' absence.

"Very well," returned Brandt. "You may remain here until I can relieve you."

The two men left the apartment. Outside the door the physician paused, saying, somewhat hesitatingly:

"Is it possible for you to produce a will which will appoint me executor?"

"Possible! Ha-ha! *All things are possible with me!* Do you see to it that a will is needed, by sending your intended victim to Laurel Hill Cemetery, and I'll see to it that you alone shall handle all his wealth."

They separated. Brandt descended the stairs, and, in the hall, summoned a male servant, whom he dispatched to the city for an undertaker.

This attended to, he entered the parlor to await Pauline.

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER.

LIKE a rose deprived of sunlight, or its allotted attention at Nature's hands—the fair bud drooped despondently upon the tender stem—Pauline came into the room, her head hung, and the bright luster of her eyes marred by flooding tears which no effort could force back. Doctor Brandt greeted her with soothing words, taking her hand and leading her to a sofa, where he seated himself beside her.

"My dear," he said, mildly, "try and not give way to your grief so. Strive to bear up."

"Oh I cannot help it," she sobbed. "How can I be calm under such a blow?"

"I am very, very sorry," continued he, "but this is one of those inevitable occurrences in which we have no right to question the motive of the Great Being in so willing."

"I know it. But oh! it is so hard. I wonder that I am not crazed. Have you ever known what it is to have a father die?"

How simple, how pointed, and yet how natural!

Brandt was silent. Here was a question, a home-thrust, sinking deep into the recesses of his heart, which for a moment unmanned him. Yes, he had known the sorrow incident to witnessing the passage from this life to death's cold embrace of a loved parent—ay, father and mother in turn. Pauline had struck a tender chord, and the first impulse created in the emotion aroused by her inquiry was to tell her that her father was *not* dead, and that he might be saved.

But, in the same flash of thought, came the dark shadow commanding him—the dread monitor who haunted his soul like a terror—a vision of the Englishman checked the utterance upon his lips—words that could have turned Pauline's mourning into happiness—and he said, instead:

"Yes, my dear, I have known the pang,

and I can, therefore, fully sympathize with you. But you must master your feelings as much as possible. Though you have lost a loving and beloved parent, you still have kind friends to comfort you in this bereavement."

"I feel sure—I know I shall never want for a warm friend while you live, doctor."

"Quite right. I shall ever guard your interests," he assured her.

"Father selected you for his executor, did he not? I thought I heard him say so at one time."

"Y-y-yes—that is—I believe—yes, he did."

"I am glad of that," Pauline continued, "for I know he made a good choice. But, Doctor Brandt, now that I remember, what was there between you and my father that led to the trouble—"

"Didn't he tell you?" he interrupted, quickly.

"No. Will you tell me?"

The physician breathed freer. Had she known what caused the difficulty with Calvert Herndon, he thought, she might also be aware of Herndon's destroying the will in which he, Gulick Brandt, was appointed executor.

"Nothing, my dear; nothing much," was his answer. "Your father misunderstood something concerning me—and you know his hasty temper? He would not allow me to explain. He forgot himself, much to my regret, and struck me. I had to strike him in self-defense—there, there, I am wounding you. I should have been more careful."

"No, no," she said, amid a fresh burst of tears, "you do not wound me. I am glad to hear it explained in some way, even though it cuts me. I know pa was always hasty."

"Mr. Victor Hassan desires to see Miss Pauline," here announced a servant.

"Admit him—admit him at once!" she cried, for the sound of her lover's name was joyful to her ear.

Victor Hassan entered the parlor, and having bowed courteously to Doctor Brandt, he totally ignored that gentleman's presence, clasping Pauline to him with affectionate tenderness.

"Pauline," he asked, "what means this dread silence about the house? Why is everything so hushed? I saw crape upon the door—"

"Death," was the one whispered, tremulous word of answer that interrupted him.

"Who, Pauline?"

"My father, Victor. Oh! he's dead—he's dead!" and she completely broke down, pillowing her head upon his breast.

The young man was staggered at this intelligence, and glanced at the physician inquiringly.

"Mr. Herndon died last night, of heart disease. It was not known till this morning, when the servants found him in his library," explained Brandt.

"This is sudden and terrible!" exclaimed Victor; then to Pauline: "Don't cry so, darling. Let me soothe you if I can. Come, sit down."

Doctor Brandt excused himself, and left them. Just outside the door he encountered Hallison Blair, whose face wore an expression of anger, while he hissed:

"What did you come out for? They'll bill and coo like doves; while I, who love her more than life, must be quiet witness of their devotion to one another!"

"A proper sense of delicacy prompted me to withdraw, Mr. Blair. If you choose to eavesdrop, and then cry against what you see and hear—I cannot help it," and with this, the Englishman was alone.

When Victor and his betrothed seated themselves, the former said:

"This is sorrowful indeed, dearest, but strive to check your grief. It is all for the best. Providence works nothing but what is just."

"Oh, Victor!" and she could speak no further.

"I could not come yesterday afternoon, as I promised," he continued. "My employer had some important private business to look after, which no one but myself could thoroughly understand. But for this I would have hastened to you. Little did I anticipate what news would greet me when I did come."

"I knew it must be something of that kind which detained you, dear Victor."

And then their conversation fell into other channels.

From the lover came words of tender consolation to the bereaved one; sentences were poured into her ear soothing as oil on troubled waters. None other than a lover could speak the condolence, whisper the solace, which brought a balm in their very sound; and as she listened, she felt her weight of woe lightened by the sincere and adequate sympathy tuned in the soft strain of pure affection.

When the moment at last arrived for Victor to depart, he arose, saying:

"Our marriage, darling, must necessarily be postponed."

"Yes, Victor," she assented.

"I can wait," continued he, seeming loth to leave her, "until the proper time. It will not be so hard to delay our happiness, considering it is by Heaven's decree. And, besides, I know our love will live as true, unvarying, till I can claim you for my own."

"I am yours now, Victor. But in this delay I shall think of you constantly. We will not have to wait so very long."

"Good-by, then, Pauline," and with a last parting embrace, he was gone.

He did not notice the shadow which crouched close in a convenient niche as he passed out; and when the door closed after him, Hallison Blair muttered between his clinched teeth:

"Ay, Victor Hassan, but the delay will be for long—you will have to wait longer than you imagine to claim Pauline Herndon for a wife. She is mine. No power on earth shall keep her from me!"

The Englishman then entered the parlor. Pauline stood where Victor had left her. Her head was drooped forward, and in her fancied solitude she sobbed violently, burying her face in her tear-wet handkerchief. But the coming step aroused her as it drew near. She looked up; the pallor of her features deepened as she saw who was with her, for beneath the garb of disinterested sympathy lurked a dread something which shone in Blair's eyes like the light of a serpent gaze.

"I come to condole with you," he said, advancing close to her.

"Oh! Mr. Blair, please leave me. Let me be alone."

"But," he pursued, "you will not deprive me of the privilege to offer sympathy in this sore trial which is brought upon you?"

"I would much rather be alone. I am afraid of you, Mr. Blair—not as one strong man fears another who is stronger, but because my heart trembles when I am in your company."

He bit his lip, but said:

"Be seated. I have something to say to you."

"Oh! do not importune me with your love! Have some consideration!" she cried, pleadingly, while the tears so mazed her vision that she could scarce see him to whom she spoke.

"Nay, you are worrying yourself unnecessarily," he interrupted, in a manner which deceived her into believing his expression sincere. "Come, be seated, and hear what I have to say."

She obeyed his request, and for the time checking her weeping, became attentive to his speech.

"I have something to communicate" (and as he spoke his glance bent fixedly upon her), "which surprises me in realizing it, while I judge, it will prove painful to you. I know you do not love me, yet, in carrying out the wishes of your dead father, you can certainly bring yourself to tolerate me."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"What I wish to say, is this: your father was evidently prevailed upon by more mature thought, to alter his intentions toward Mr. Victor Hassan. Though he told you to choose your own husband, it seems he changed his mind, and concluded to make the choice himself."

Pauline gazed at him in bewildered silence.

"I happened to enter the library, just now, and on the large desk, at which your father was in the habit of sitting, I saw an

envelope directed to myself, and containing this note. Read it."

As he concluded, he handed her a note, which she perceived to be in Calvert Herndon's handwriting, and which ran as follows:

"LORD HALLISON BLAIR:—

"ESTEEMED FRIEND:—There is no telling when one may be called from this world to the next. In view of this, a sense of duty indicates a course on my part, that will provide for my daughter, Pauline, as is fitting her station in life. My consent, it is true, was given to a marriage between my child and Victor Hassan; but, it was done without that full thought and careful consideration I, as a parent, should have exercised. I have weighed the matter well, and deem it expedient that you take Pauline to yourself—ay, particularly request, knowing your affection for her, that you do so. She can forget the hasty engagement with one not able to care for her as she has been reared. In marrying you she will be elevated to that position to which she is entitled. Take her; be kind to her; and in that event, all I possess shall revert to her when of age. She will not refuse your proposal of marriage when she knows this to be my express desire, the hope of a father whose solicitude is unbounded, and every thought tended to her future welfare. I write this while filled with the presentiment of coming evil.

"Your true friend,

"CALVERT HERNDON."

The epistle fell from her nerveless hand, and, with an agonizing moan, she sunk back in a swoon.

She lay, her white face upturned, still, marble-like, seemingly bereft of animation; while the villain, who had at first glowered, unseen, over the fair head as she bowed in perusal of the letter, now felt uneasy, unable to decide upon a course of action.

It was only for a moment. Then he sprang toward the bell-cord, and pulled it violently.

"Help! assistance here!" he cried. "Come, some one—help!"

Alarmed at the fierce clang of the bell, and his loud calls, several servants came rushing pell-mell to the parlor. Explaining Pauline's state to one of the maids, he abruptly dismissed the others, picked up the billet that lay on the floor, and retired to an alcove, where his victim might not see him when she recovered consciousness.

Under the persistent efforts of the terrified, wondering waiting-maid, Pauline slowly returned to that life of which she had been suddenly and momentarily robbed.

Gradually she recalled what had happened. She glanced about her to see if Blair, her persecutor, was still in the room.

"Are you ill?—what is the matter?—what can I do?" asked the girl, in anxious tone.

"No; it is nothing, Kate," answered Pauline, evasively, and arising from the sofa. "I am faint, and weak—nothing more. I will go to my room."

With the maid's assistance, she tottered, rather than walked, from the parlor, and the Englishman, as he watched her retreating form, muttered:

"That will fix it. This letter is all-powerful, as I judged it would be. She will not go contrary to the wishes of her father; I know her nature too well to anticipate any further difficulty. She is mine! mine! mine!" and he strode from the alcove, out into the hall, and up-stairs to his private apartments.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESTROYED DOCUMENT.

HALLISON BLAIR was in a state of exuberance.

"Aha!" he hissed. "I hold the winning card. I play my hand—it is cunning, careful, successful. She is mine! Victor Hassan shall grind his teeth in despair. Pauline shall be my wife, and bend to my rule. I am lucky. Fortune and luck. They differ. Luck comes of itself. Fortune is acquired by labor. I have labored very little, so far. Well, what now?"

There was a tap at the door, and Gulick Brandt came in, closing the door after him.

"It's you, eh, doctor? Come, sit down. I feel in excellent spirits, very excellent. I am lucky. I was just congratulating myself when you interrupted."

As the physician appropriated a chair, he asked:

"What has occurred?"

"The best thing imaginable. Read that."

He handed him the letter, purporting to have been written by Calvert Herndon, which had caused Pauline a new agony, struck so deeply to her sore heart that she had swooned under it.

Brandt read, and then returned the epistle. As Blair folded and carefully replaced it in his pocket, the other said, interrogatively:

"I suppose you mean to use this in furthering your resolve in marrying Pauline Herndon?"

"Certainly; but I have already used it."

"You have shown it to her?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"Fainted! Fainted in my arms. She took it pretty hard; but I couldn't help that, you know. It had to be done; now it's over, and I have gained my point. She is undoubtedly mine! Mr. Hassan will, by force of necessity, yield the field."

"You wrote that yourself?" inquired the physician, who had detected a few deviations from the practiced chirography of the deceased.

"Yes. Is it good? I think it perfect."

"Beyond a doubt, the handwriting would be mistaken for that of Calvert Herndon."

"But, aside from that—what have you done? When have you decided the funeral shall take place?"

"It must be to-morrow. Herndon lies in a trance, produced by some powerful drug. What that drug is, I am at a loss—"

"Comel you might as well stop that nonsense. It won't do, *murderer of Calvert Herndon!* it won't do!"

"Calvert Herndon is not dead."

"No matter; the crime is the same. Attempt to restore him if you dare. You aimed a blow at his life, meant to kill him. You are guilty, and *I can prove it!*" And Brandt shrunk coweringly before this forcible speech. "But go on. What arrangements have you perfected?" continued the Englishman.

"The reason I say the burial must take place to-morrow is, if not then, Herndon will recover without medical aid."

"Devil! That is unlucky. We must be prompt. Have you sent the notice of his death to any of the papers?"

"Yes. I dispatched a man a few minutes since. The notice will be in time for the evening publications."

"Good. What time have you fixed?"

"Eleven A. M."

"I give you credit again. You are managing cleverly. You will gain a rich prize, doctor. We glide along smoothly, don't we, eh?"

"When are you going to place the perfect will in my hands?" asked the physician.

"Oh, as soon as possible. I have it all here. See!"

He took a coat from his wardrobe and extracted from the pocket the bits and pieces of the destroyed will. At sight of the confused jumble, Brandt cried:

"Why, man, that is useless. Nothing can be made of that. If this is your sole dependence, I fear you will disappoint me."

"Not a bit of it. I could write a new will altogether, if it suited me to do so. But it don't suit me. I prefer another way. Don't get uneasy. When I was a boy, I used to astonish my companions by arranging Chinese puzzles that would baffle the fingers of a magician. Now, I am going to put this will together in the same way. It is not a very lengthy one."

Brandt looked at the Englishman incredulously. The latter quietly proceeded to pull off his coat, and, wheeling a chair up to the table on which he had deposited the fragments, leisurely set about his most difficult task.

"How long will this take you?" was the physician's inquiry, as he glanced at the torn, uneven slips, and squares, and crooked points that lay in a discouraging pile.

Hallison Blair looked at his watch.

"Just noon," he said, contemptively.

"I'll get through by four o'clock; have half an hour to get to town, and nearly three hours left in which to finish the business."

"Are you sure you will not fail in this?"

"Positive. But you must not engage my

attention now. I am very busy. Lo! there's a start."

He fingered the pieces with inconceivable rapidity and precision; and Brandt saw, as he watched, first a letter fitted in, then two letters, then a word; more letters, another word; he was progressing fast, sure, much to his satisfaction.

He had made no idle boast. What would have seemed, to another, an insurmountable task, proved a light work, an easy work, a pastime under his skill, patience and ardent application. The looker-on marveled at the worker's aptitude.

In the midst of a deep silence came a summons at the door. The Englishman paused; the physician paled. The latter feared detection.

"Who's there, and what do you want?" interrogated Blair, composedly.

"If you please, sir," was answered from the outside, "the undertaker's waitin' in the parlor."

"You had better see him," turning to Brandt.

Without delay, the physician arose and left the room, following the servant downstairs.

Hallison Blair, having locked the door, returned to the table and his work.

Piece after piece he took up; piece after piece he laid down; piece after piece he placed in its proper position; line after line, slowly, perfectly, readably formed itself. He labored on persistently. Moments passed; an hour; two hours passed; the lines multiplied; his fingers were busy, his eyes were busy, his mind was busy; he persevered; was determined, confident. As he applied himself the more closely, he became the more satisfied; that was plainly visible in his face.

He had predicted rightly in two things; first, he could perform what he had promised; second, he could have it done by four o'clock.

The last small corner of the parchment was adjusted; he started up, uttered a sigh of relief, an exclamation, drew forth his watch. It was half-past three.

"Fortunate! Now this is fortunate. I have worked, and achieved my aim. I am first lucky, and then fortunate. Combine the two, and they are carpenters and builders of triumph."

He pulled the bell-rope, unlocked the door, and waited. A servant soon appeared, to whom he gave the order:

"Have the black horse, 'Comet,' that was the especial pride of Mr. Herndon, brought around to the front door immediately."

"Saddle, or buggy, sir?"

"Saddle. Be quick," and as the man departed, he turned to a closet, and took therefrom a bottle of gum arabic. Then, laying a sheet of Bristol board upon the table, he carefully transferred the adjusted will, piece by piece, to it. He exercised great care, occupying nearly the whole half-hour left before four o'clock, and when this second feature was ended, he held up the final result at arm's length, and regarded it. "All right," he commented, laying it in a larger book. Then he redonned his coat, took up the book, and quitted the apartment. In the large hall he met the undertaker, who was going back to the city for some trifling necessary, leaving his assistants in charge of the supposed corpse. Blair saluted him pleasantly, remarking upon the weather and other unimportant topics, and the two went out together to the front of the house.

The undertaker's wagon was there, and also the horse ordered by the Englishman.

"As we go in each other's company," said Blair, "I would suggest that you permit me to order a horse for you. It will be much more pleasant than if you rode in your wagon. Shall I call the groom?"

"Oh yes; certainly. If it won't inconvenience you," bowed the boxer of dead bodies.

The second horse was brought, and the two men vaulted into the saddles.

At this juncture, Doctor Brandt came out of the house, and Blair paused as he saw the former desired a word with him.

"Did you succeed?" questioned the physician, in a whisper, resting one hand on the pommel of the saddle, and leaning forward so that the Englishman's companion might not catch their dialogue.

"Certainly," was the reply, given in the same low, guarded tone. "Hallison Blair never undertakes that which he thinks he will fail in; and once started does not stop, nor hesitate, till the object is accomplished. The will is again whole."

"But others will readily detect its having been—"

"Not when I have got through with it. Do you suppose I would show, for examination, a stitched or pasted parchment? You reflect discreditably upon my ability to perfect what I plan. When you see the will, I can defy even you to detect a flaw, and therefore any one else would fail to discover the cheat."

"How will you do this?"

"Never mind, now. I will explain when I have more time. *Au revoir!*" and he gave the horse the rein with those remarks. The two men dashed off at a gallop.

The steeds from the stables of the Home Mansion were highly mettled, blooded stock; swift of limb, and slender, graceful, symmetrical in build. No whip, nor spur was needed; the voice alone proved sufficient incentive, and the well-groomed animals fairly flew over the smooth road, speeding as competing racers.

Doctor Gulick Brandt returned to the house, and sought the library in which he had quarreled with his old friend—the room wherein he had, upon candid solicitation, tendered his advice, counsel, views in regard to business speculations, private schemes, etc., that at times merited the attention of Calvert Herndon, the retired merchant, the man of wealth, the generous, open-hearted, whole-souled man, who was universally esteemed.

As he trod the rich carpet he meditated upon the fated cluster of incidents which seemed twined about this particular period of his life. He reviewed the plot he was assisting in carrying out.

Murder! This one word stood emblazoned in dread letters of fire before Brandt's eyes, carved by an invisible demon in the foreground of his vision.

"But I am innocent!" arose constantly to his lips, as he walked back and forth.

'Twas useless. Even as the words shaped themselves, were created mentally, or in outspoken sentence, there came a mocking, tantalizing voice in his ears, reverberating through his brain, as an echo through a limitless cavern:

"You cannot prove it! You cannot prove it!"

His temples throbbed, his knees trembled; he realized fully his situation, and sunk into the nearest chair, oblivious to all things save the knowledge of the crime to which he was an ally.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLOW FROM BEHIND.

THE day was a lovely one. A solitude unbroken, save by the warbling of birds and soft whispering of the perfumed breezes, as they gently rustled the bright green leaves, reigned in and around the Home Mansion.

Numerous cabs and carriages were to be seen slowly approaching the great gate, wheeling silently into line, and forming a lengthy cortege that stretched far down the road.

Friends, acquaintances, strangers, alike assembled in a grave, hushed way, around the parlor-door, wherein lay Calvert Herndon, garbed for the final sleep which comes inevitably to all.

At length, one by one, the sea of faces passed before, and gazed for a moment upon the cold, calm features of him who had so recently been flushed in perfect health, and not a few eyes moistened as they dwelt for the last time on that picture of serene, unstudied tranquillity.

Among the rest was Victor Hassan. Having tried in vain to see his betrothed—being informed that she had ordered "no" to all who might seek her—he took his place, and as he filed past the rich coffin, there swelled within him an emotion impossible to portray.

In looking upon the pale face of Calvert Herndon, as the latter lay habited for the grave, he had been startled by an unexpected discovery—a discovery which, for an instant, checked the beating of his heart.

Upon the lips of the corpse he had fan-

cied he detected a slight moisture. Whether it was a delusion or actual sight, he was at first unable to decide; but now he became fully impressed with the idea that Herndon was not yet dead—wholly dead.

But when the deep voice of the pastor of St. Stephens was heard, in prayer to the Giver of Life, to receive the dead man's soul, he could but think that his impressions were not to be entirely trusted; but, he determined to be satisfied nevertheless ere many hours.

A few brief minutes—then came the calls for the carriages, and the hearse moved slowly toward the gate.

can Pauline mean by this? Refuse to see any one—*me*? I can not account for it."

He did not depart, but sought an arbor in the garden where he sat down to think. It was the same arbor in which he and Pauline had exchanged their happy vows only two days before. He was surprised beyond measure that Pauline's wish for solitude had extended even to his exclusion. While thus absorbed, a form darkened the bowered entrance, and Hallison Blair stood before his rival.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Englishman, immediately. This *is* a surprise. I did not expect to find you here."

"I presume not," bluntly returned Victor.

speech contained an insult to his hot nature. The blood mantled to his cheek as he said:

"Hallison Blair, explain yourself."

"In what respect?"

"Your words."

"Well, I shall do so. When I said that a wish on your part to see Miss Herndon was insufficient to detain you, I meant that you had no right to see her."

"No right to see her?"

"Precisely; and for the reason that she is the affianced of another."

"Affianced of another! Impossible! Who?"

"Your obedient servant—me."



"ARE YOU DETERMINED TO PUSH ME THUS?"

Victor went out to the steps. Pauline passed him, her fair head bowed, supported upon the arm of Hallison Blair. The latter seeing Victor, glanced at him from glittering eyes of commingled triumph and hate.

The train wound into the road at a slow pace, and turned toward Laurel Hill.

"I wish to see Miss Pauline, I tell you. I care not for etiquette or form; I must see her," demanded Victor Hassan, as, after the funeral, he stood at the door of the Home Mansion.

"I'm very sorry, sir," was the servant's reply, "but I have orders to admit no one—no matter who."

"Strange," he thought, turning away, for he saw that argument was useless. "What

"I heard that you had come to the house, and gone away," continued Blair. "Why should you remain here?"

"And why not?" was the quick rejoinder, and the young man flashed a steady gaze upon the other.

"Oh, I had no idea there could be ought to detain you, that's all," and the shoulder shrugged, and the lips smiled, sarcastically.

"Naught to detain me, sir! What do you mean! Is it not natural that I should wish to see Pauline?"

"I don't see that it is. Do you imagine to meet her here? Have a cigar."

He produced his cigar-case and extended it to his rival, maintaining nonchalant composure. Victor was angry. He thrust Blair's hand aside. He neither liked nor feared the man, and the Englishman's

Victor looked at him incredulously.

"I know that you have attempted to win Pauline Herndon," he said presently, "and what little penetration I possess, tells me you are a man who would not hesitate to employ base means. But you have failed. Pauline is mine."

"No, she is not," asserted Blair, calmly; "she is mine."

"Yours? Preposterous! Mr. Herndon, ere he died, approved an engagement between his daughter and myself."

"Since which time, and also before his decease, he very wisely changed his mind. He concluded it would be more to his daughter's interest to wed an equal and not an inferior—that equal is myself, Lord Hallison Blair, a gentleman of rank."

"It's a base lie! Mr. Herndon was not

a man to stoop to duplicity. He was too noble to cherish thoughts that would crush the hopes he gave Pauline and I. I do not believe you."

"You will, perhaps, be compelled to realize it. And let me suggest that your tongue be stronger chained when it leaps to give the lie."

"If you assert this thing, I say you lie—lie basely, and insult three persons: first, the dead father of her whom you also insult by daring to call yours; and third, me, for you couple falsehoods in your language that an honorable man would scorn. I do not fear you. Though you be a peer to the haughtiest monarch in all Europe, here, in America, I am your equal in title, your superior as a man."

"Ha!"

"Ay, you hear and understand. I do not believe this tale. There is something behind it that will not bear scrutiny. You start! You have concocted some vile plot to rob me of Pauline. I read that in your eye. It will not remain long unexposed. The eyes of love are keen. If aught exists unworthy the approval of a true gentleman, I shall ferret that unworthiness out."

Blair paled slightly. Victor continued:

"As I passed the coffin to-day, to take a last look at Mr. Herndon, I saw upon his lips, which were bloodless as those of a corpse, a moisture. It was scarce perceptible, yet apparent. I suspect that Mr. Herndon, this very instant, breathes the air of a grave, while yet of this life. I mean to have my suspicion verified or denied by an examination. I feel sure that my suspicions are well founded; and if so, then we'll see if what you say is true."

During this speech the pallor which had overspread Blair's face, deepened, visibly. When he spoke, his voice was somewhat husky.

"What—what's that you say?" he ejaculated, brokenly. "You have an idea that Mr. Herndon is not dead? You intend petitioning the authorities for permission to look into the matter?"

"More than that; I mean to examine for myself, and accept the consequences—good or bad."

"But this idea of yours is simply ridiculous."

"Whatever it may seem to you, does not trouble me, nor affect my intentions. I shall have another look at the face of the buried merchant. When I am satisfied, one way or the other, you shall hear from me again. For the present, I will overlook your insults. I bid you good-day, sir."

He turned to leave the spot, but, at that instant, he received a stunning blow upon the head from some one who had been standing behind him.

He could have recovered from his unlooked-for attack, but that the Englishman sprung forward, and struck him several times in succession about the head and temples, which robbed him of all consciousness, and he sunk down to the greensward, limp, powerless.

"Well done, doctor!" cried Blair, contemplating the helpless form at his feet.

The arbor had two openings. Blair stood before the front, while the physician, coming in at the rear entrance, and overhearing a portion of the young man's words, had promptly dealt the foul blow.

"It had to be done," said Brandt. "He would have betrayed us; and our two lives are worth more than one. I think we've killed him."

"No doubt of it. We pounded him hard enough."

"And now we are in a dilemma. What shall we do with the body?"

"I see but one course. Wait a moment."

He glided abruptly from the arbor, and Gulick Brandt was left alone with their victim.

After a short absence the Englishman reappeared, saying:

"It's all right. No one is moving about the house. We will not be seen."

"What are you going to do?"

"We must take him to the cellar and bury him. There will be no difficulty in that; the earth is not hard; besides, I remember Mr. Herndon set out some fruit trees this spring, and the box they came in is in the cellar, for I have seen it there. Do you hesitate?"

"Hesitate? No. This body must be got rid of, and the plan you suggest is the only one which appears sensible."

"Take hold then; we'll get in by the earth-door, and no one will see us."

The two men lifted Victor Hassan and bore him away.

Entering the cellar by the back outside doors, they deposited the body, and each grasped a tool from the rack near at hand and went earnestly to work, digging, shoveling, till the perspiration stood upon their brows in great drops.

The hole widened, deepened, lengthened, until its capacity was sufficient to contain the box.

And then Victor Hassan was placed in this secret grave.

The loose earth was spread over the lid of the box, and that which remained, they scattered about the floor, so covering it with straw and litter that no one would have suspected that, beneath the surface, lay a second victim to man's atrocity.

When the murderous riddance was thus accomplished, the physician turned to Blair.

"What have you done about the will?" he asked.

"You shall have it in due time, never fear. I have made all secure in that direction."

"Tell me your plan."

"Well, I don't mind. I propose to furnish you a lithographed copy."

"Are you sure?—are you positive there will be no—"

"No danger? Yes—certain. Money goes, without fail, to the furtherance of all objects, you know. I have arranged, by bribery, with a lithographer, to get up a true copy of the will. He said the 'job' was so delicate that he would require time. I could not do otherwise than grant it. As soon as he has it ready, he will place it in my hands."

"How deep, deep, deep we are getting!" half-mused the physician, as he gazed down, meditatively, at the gravel loam they had cast about.

"What!—do you flinch?" and Blair's eyes fixed piercingly upon his companion.

"No!" exclaimed Brandt, with emphasis.

"I am afloat in this vile plot; now let me see if you outwork me in successfully managing it. I am desperate, Hallison Blair—Lord Hallison, in this new, strange, terrible position you have forced upon me! Murder now rests upon my hands if it never rested there before; and it is too late too reconsider. Our interests, henceforth, are identical; we are allied; we will work together."

The two schemers repaired to Hallison Blair's apartments, where they whiled away the time in cigars and conversation.

Toward nightfall, the Englishman rung the bell, and ordered the girl who answered his summons, to fetch wine.

She was absent quite a while; in fact, Blair was growing impatient at the delay, when at last she came.

"Well," he said, in a vexed tone, "what detained you so?"

"I couldn't help it, sir," was the hesitating and indefinite reply.

"Never mind, then; begone," and as the girl withdrew, he and the physician turned their attention to the sparkling beverage before them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNWILLING BRIDE.

A FORTNIGHT passed, and during that time Pauline remained alone with her sorrow, scarcely ever leaving her room except to attend meals, and quite often these were sent up to her.

The brilliancy of her eyes were worn away with constant weeping; the rosy flush of her cheeks was faded; the whole expression of her face—a face that once had beamed with all the light of a happy heart—was changed to that of woe.

She had frequently wondered, as she sat alone weeping, why Victor did not come near her. His continued absence, while it seemed strange, was also productive of another pang. What could account for his remaining away? She could not answer, and as she marveled she grieved the more.

And so the days dragged by; the load of mourning became heavier.

In the time that had elapsed since Calvert Herndon's burial, the two schemers accomplished much toward furthering the stability of their position.

The will Hallison Blair had promised should be read at the proper moment, came promptly from the lithographer, who was sworn to secrecy ere he received his pay; and Doctor Brandt experienced a feeling of security when he glanced over the parchment. It was perfect; no flaw, mistake nor difference from the genuine chirography was discernible; and when the document was read in court and Brandt was recognized by law as Calvert Herndon's executor, without bond, he inwardly rejoiced—thereafter, his life was to be one of luxury, ease, comfort, without effort or toil.

One day Pauline received a message from Hallison Blair to the effect that he wished to see her in the drawing-room. Up to this time, he had not imposed his society upon her, and she felt grateful. Now he wished to speak with her—of what?

She trembled with doubts, yet resigned herself to the fate in store; she easily surmised what was coming, and endeavored to calm her nerves, to dry her tears, to prepare for the pending ordeal, the inevitable—in-avoidable, because she had thought maturely upon the wishes of her dead father, as set forth in the letter shown her by Hallison Blair, and concluded that, in duty she was bound to follow the dictates of the departed one, no matter how severe the trial.

She descended to the parlor, where were seated the Englishman and Doctor Brandt.

"We regret to have called you from the solace of solitude, Pauline," spoke Blair, "but it is time that I touched upon the subject of our marriage. As I propose returning to England immediately, the sooner our wedding is solemnized the better."

"So soon!" she exclaimed, in a low voice, full of surprise.

"It is soon," he acknowledged, speaking mildly, as if the tone he used was previously studied, "yet, it is necessary. I have received letters which call me back to my home in London, and as I cannot go without you, I think we had best be married before we start; don't you?"

Then he continued, after a moment's silence: "My trunks have already gone forward to the ocean packet, at New York. You can get your own apparel ready at once. I presume?"

"It will look so strange, Mr. Blair," she remonstrated, tearfully.

"Oh! no; we will be married, and sail for England at once. There will be no room for gossip, and if there should be any, it will not greet our ears. But I am speaking rather for granted—you have decided to respect the last wishes of your father, have you not, as regards ourselves?"

"Yes," was the sad reply. "I must obey. He was so good, so kind to me always, that I can not rebel now."

"That's right. Very right, Miss Pauline," said Brandt. "Though your father is not here to control your actions by pleasant word and governing smile, rest assured he looks on from above, and all you do will give him pleasure, nevertheless."

"I judged this would be your decision," resumed Blair, "and when Mr. Hassan came here the day after the funeral—"

"Oh! then he has been here? He did come?" she interrupted, with quick eagerness.

"Yes, he came and had a long talk. You were very much indisposed then, you remember, and of course he could not see you. I told him of the change in affairs; of your being my affianced through deference to Mr. Herndon's expressed wish, and he has not called since," and he considered this matter safely, cleverly gotten over.

"Ah!" thought she, "then this is why I have not seen him. Oh! Victor—dear Victor! I must give you up. I may never see you again. May Heaven guard you always, and bring you happiness that never can be mine!" Then aloud:

"Since it must be so, Mr. Blair, when are we to be married?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow!" the word echoed from Pauline's lips, in tone of veriest astonishment.

"Yes, to-morrow. The doctor will accompany us on our voyage."

There reigned a stillness in the room of several seconds' duration, when Pauline asked:

"Are you determined to push me thus? Can you not wait a short time?"

"Impossible. I cannot delay!" he answered, and his manner was rather emphatic. "Come, do not let this give you fresh worryment. Strive to look brighter, more cheerful. Are you going to bestow yourself upon me a sorrowing bride?"

He advanced, and, twining an arm round her waist, imprinted a kiss upon her unwilling lips. It was done ere she divined his intention, and though she could not prevent his action, she recoiled from his embrace as if the touch were pollution.

"I—I—I will endeavor to be ready by to-morrow," she said, drawing back. "At what hour must I be torn from the dear old Home Mansion?"

"At precisely twelve—noon. We can then be married in time to catch the evening train for New York, and be aboard ship by ten o'clock day after to-morrow. One reason why I am in such haste is, the vessel sails on the day and at the hour named."

"I will be ready," and with this, she walked slowly from the parlor, struggling hard to restrain the gushing tears.

So soon! To-morrow!

A few hours more, and she would bid adieu to the loved spot endeared to her from childhood; enter a new field in life; be surrounded by strange faces; hear strange voices; with no friends, save her husband and the physician—the first, a man she could never love; the latter, one whose villainous hypocrisy she had yet to learn; both of them friends that were not friends, but enemies whose natures warped to diabolical tendencies.

She left all arrangements to her waiting-maid, a girl who knew well how to please the taste of her mistress, and then, when night came, retired to her couch. Her head did not press the pillow to seek repose. Her mind was too busy, too loaded, too agonized to admit of slumber.

The next day brought no cheer or gladness to her exhausted spirits. The bright sunshine, the caroling birds, the humming insects, the lovely flowers and freshly-blown rosebuds, all were lost in the one sole anxiety of thought. The warm light was joyless; the bird songs were as a funeral chant; the voice of the insects seemed as a death-watch.

The hour arrived—the dread hour in which she must take a farewell leave of the many charms and loved objects that clustered around her home. The last servant was dismissed, the house closed, and at twelve o'clock Pauline was seated in a carriage, in company with Doctor Gulick Brandt and the man who was to be her future husband.

The wedding at St. Paul's Church, Philadelphia, was a quiet one, only a few being there to witness the ceremony, and these few especially invited through favor.

Some thought the bride strangely affected for one about to win a rich and handsome husband; a few thought that, beneath the veil she wore, they saw the glisten of tears. But this attracted no very particular attention.

Perhaps she felt deeply moved by the happiness about to be realized in the cementing of the golden bonds? They who looked upon her, thought this; but how widely off from the true cause!

The Englishman had made good his vow. On that calm, clear, beautiful day, Pauline Herndon became his wife. He had won the object of his passion; she was his by right of law, and by the words of a minister of God; yet, how had he accomplished these ends?

After the conclusion of the ceremony, they returned to the carriage. As they entered the conveyance, the driver thrust a slip of paper into her hand, saying:

"Hide that—quick! and read it when you have time."

Involuntarily she secreted the paper in her bosom, and as they whirled away toward the ferry, she wondered within herself what it could be she had received. She had not had time to notice the two forms on the opposite

side of the street, staring at her like statues of living marble, fixed, pale, motionless, as she emerged from the door of the church; and who followed the carriage with their eyes till it was lost to view.

From the ferry Pauline, her husband and the physician went to the cars at the Camden depot, and continued their journey.

Arriving in New York without accident or delay, they went aboard the ship to which the baggage had been previously ordered, and at the hour fixed, the vessel left her anchorage.

Pauline seemed as one in a walking trance; her surroundings being in a maze of confusion that did not distract the vision, but rather soothed it. She lived, heard, saw, but could not fully realize. Blair became more than ever attentive to his sad bride, striving to win from her a smile such as she was wont to bestow, at one time, upon all the inmates of the Home Mansion.

But his efforts were in vain. Pauline bowed her head to the cruel fate which had allotted such a gall to her existence, such a thorn-path under her—smiled not, and when she spoke her voice was low, sweet, mild, and tremulous with emotional sadness.

As the white sails filled, and she was borne slowly, further and further from her native land, she stood upon the deck, near the bulwarks, and a sigh, a hushed moan of anguish quivered on her lips.

When naught was to be seen save the sky, above, and the waters beneath, and the riding, dancing ship, the last spark of hope seemed faded.

She was upon the broad ocean, going to London, the home of her unloved husband.

CHAPTER X.

A NOBLEMAN'S HOME.

A FINE house, a disagreeable owner—like a pretty box, with miserable contents—a palatial abode, with disliked occupant. Here lived the man who was unpopular, because of his uncharitableness, inhospitality, haughty and arrogant exterior toward the community in general. A gambler; a lover of fast horses; a man fond of extravagant, flashy display and strong drink; a frequenter of faro-tables; a heavy bettor at roulette; experienced at cards, to trick, cheat, defraud—a winner often, a loser seldom; a handsome man, an educated man, polite to equals, cringing to superiors, steel-hearted, proud, quick-tempered with inferiors; his conversation with either class always in speech that contained a hidden significance; and, finally, holding reputation considerably below par among the eminent social circles of London society.

This was Lord Hallison Blair—a man who had played recklessly with a name handed down unsullied, yet was received graciously at the royal court, was flattered by smiling ladies, was feared by the common people, whom he despised.

"May he be cursed!"

Exclamations like this escaped the lips of many who had occasion to pass a magnificent residence, of unusually attractive architecture, situated in Square St. James, London, where lived Lord Hallison Blair with his bride—where lived the two plotters, the noble, and the physician, companions in guilt, but apparently secure in their princely retreat from all inquiry or suspicion.

The Englishman and Brandt were seated, in the private apartments of the former on the afternoon of a clear, warm day, near summer's close. A decanter and wine-glasses were on the table before them, and they discussed the liquor in familiar style and lively strain.

"Well," said Blair, holding up a glass of sparkling wine between himself and the sun-rays that entered at the window, "what do you begin to think of the general state of things now, eh? Don't you find it different from being hard at work—beating a living out of ailing patients, and writing Latin prescriptions?"

"You will remember, I once said I might be reconciled—"

"Reconciled? Ha! ha! ha!"

"You will not let me finish. I said I might, after awhile, become reconciled. I am more than that now. I am pleased in reviewing the cleverness with which we have

managed the affair throughout," and the physician smiled grimly.

"Of course you are! Of course you are!" exclaimed Hallison Blair. "You are learning what it is to live stylishly among our best society. You have ridden behind the best horses in my stables, and there's some flesh there that can't be beaten by any other in the country! You've seen the ins and outs of London life pretty thoroughly, after being my companion in everything. You have seen how much satisfaction is derived from a fat purse; and if you're not more than reconciled, I marvel greatly. By-the-by, don't you think my pretty Pauline is well deserving of the unbounded admiration which everybody bestows upon her?"

"Undoubtedly. I can hardly believe my eyes—"

"And they are not so good as they were once," interrupted Blair. "I am afraid you don't sleep well, doctor, notwithstanding your habitual outward composure. I am very quick to perceive these things. Take my advice, and don't think so much about the money you are handling—where it came from, and so forth. But, excuse me. Proceed. What were you about to say?"

"It surprises me to note how Lady Blair has improved since her sojourn here. I feared she would never regain her former look of blooming health; but she is even more lovely than she was before her father died."

"Died! Died you say? Ha! ha! ha! How singular it is, doctor, you persistently assert that Calvert Herndon died! I believe you will stand by that as long as you live."

"I was not the direct cause of the merchant's death, Lord Hallison," said Brandt, a shadow settling upon his face. "In truth, I am innocent."

"Innocent! There you go again, avowing your innocence for the one-hundred-and-first time. I wonder if you were in a somnambulistic state when you drove from the city of Philadelphia out to Herndon's house, entered the library, placed a poisonous pastille on the desk under his nose and caused his unnatural decease? I have often wondered" (he concluded with a touch of sarcasm) "if such might not have been the case."

Doctor Gulick Brandt looked the other in the eye. But only for a second; his gaze was not so strong, steady, unflinching as the hard, metallic glance of the Englishman; and as the physician winced under the searching, suaky eyes that fixed upon him, his head drooped, and he said:

"You know I am innocent of that deed of which you accuse me."

"I know you are innocent? I? I, of all persons, to acquiesce in that? To the contrary, I know you are guilty. Don't I keep reminding you of the fact, to keep your spirits up? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ay, you torment me, each day that passes, by speaking of Calvert Herndon's murder," coweringly rejoined Brandt. "As to keeping my spirits up—bah! I've none left save the evil spirit which exists in my heart. I know that, to-day, I am as great a villain as you. But it was not so once."

"Very likely. Few men are born villains."

"Even admitting that I was instrumental in Herndon's death, what use is there in throwing out unending charges of murder? I believe the burial of Pauline's father a more horrible murder than if we had killed him outright."

"Victor Hassan, for example."

"While Calvert Herndon lay dressed for the grave, there was yet life in him. Neither you nor I stayed the funeral. Therefore, you are deeply involved as myself."

"That is absurd. How was I to know he still lived?"

"I am a physician, and I saw the fact before me; I advised you of it. Then, instead of countenancing an effort to resuscitate him, you threatened me if I disclosed my knowledge to others. I hold you proportionately accountable in this, Hallison Blair."

As Brandt thus spoke, he appeared to derive considerable self-assurance from the words. He looked up again; assumed a calmer air.

"But the pastille—the pastille?" maliciously suggested Lord Hallison, leaning slightly forward, and concentrating upon the doctor.

a glance that would seem to read his very soul.

"I have my opinions regarding that," returned the physician. "Since I came to London I have had time to reflect. I have my opinions."

"And, pray, what are they?" was the indifferent question.

"I am not only satisfied in my own conscience, of my innocence, but I suspect who placed the deadly pastille in the library."

"Have you? Well, and *whom* do you suspect?"

"You."

"Pshaw! Let us talk of something else. I have been holding this glass in my hand till my wrist aches. Fill your glass and drink."

Nothing more was said upon the subject then; the physician poured out some wine, and each drank to the continued success of their scheme.

As they set down their empty glasses, the door opened, and a lady entered.

She was attired fashionably for a drive; jewels upon her fingers and person, and raiment of costly fabrics. Her ripe lips are arched; eyes sparkle with fire beneath the long, shading lashes; her mien is graceful, composed, commanding. It is Pauline—Lady Hallison Blair—a leading belle—a peer among the haughtiest and wealthiest—without a rival in loveliness, brilliancy of conversation, and love of her gay life. Lords and ladies alike pay her their homage, forgetting, in her society, that she is the wife of a man disliked and shunned by all honorable men. All within her circle of acquaintance are captivated by her winning smile and sensible converse; yet not blind to notice, at times, a sudden change, when she would become cold toward those around her.

Lady Hallison Blair alone, knew the cause of these abrupt changes in herself from life and gaiety, to silence and immobility. Amid the festive scenes in which she mingled, there would come a feeling as if her dead father stood near; a shadow like a cloud before the bright sun; a sensation of an existing something, which lingered, unseen, at her side, and stayed her light laugh, paled her cheek, rendered motionless the lips that had been moving fast in pleasant strain.

"Well," said Lord Hallison, "you are going out?"

"For a short drive," she answered, and her voice was even richer in its musical purity of tone than when she reiterated her betrothal vows with Victor Hassan, at the Home Mansion, beyond the Atlantic.

"You go alone, my love?" he pursued.

"Yes. I presume you have no desire to accompany me—you and Doctor Brandt seem so absorbed in each other," and here she flashed a significant look upon the physician, whose back was turned toward her. Blair saw, and smiled.

"I suppose my wife, Lady Hallison Blair, so favorably received everywhere, admired by all for her beauty, a queen of society, can do without the company of her husband this once—eh, love?"

"Oh, certainly. Rest assured I shall not long want for company."

"*Au revoir*, then. I wish you an enjoyable ride."

She swept from the apartment without speaking further, and as the door closed after her, Lord Hallison turned to his companion with the exclamation:

"By Heaven! I think she grows more beautiful every hour. She was a perfect houri when I married her; now—now—what term is fitting? what word adequate? what name, unless we borrow that of Venus, could do justice to her charms?"

The physician made no answer.

"You see," continued the nobleman, "I have won a prize—you have gained a mint. Take my advice for a second time, and spend her money freely while you have opportunity. You know Pauline comes of age in November. All her father's wealth becomes hers then. Draw heavily while the chance lasts."

"Do you not apprehend that suspicion may be aroused, if I spend too much money?"

"Suspicion? Nonsense! Nobody in London knows the amount of the annuity left you by Calvert Herndon; and what if it were otherwise? It would make no difference.

Had any individual sufficient brass to question you regarding your financial affairs, you could refer them to Lord Blair, who, I pledge you, would never answer to their satisfaction. But never fear; we don't do things that way here."

Brandt arose and walked to the window. He simply wished to see Pauline driven off in the open barouche, with restless, gayly-caparisoned horses, held in rein by the flash-liveried groom.

But he had no sooner looked out, his gaze had scarcely been directed to the opposite side of the street, when he uttered a stifled cry, dashed his hands to his forehead, and reeled back to the center of the apartment, falling.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT ALARMED THE PHYSICIAN.

ASTONISHED as was Hallison Blair by this singular condition of his friend, he did not pause to ascertain the cause, but sprang quickly forward, and sustained Brandt's sinking form.

"In the name of the Seven Wonders, doctor, what ails you?" cried he, dragging and lifting the physician to a chair.

Brandt groaned, gasped, parted his lips, but could not articulate; and his eyes, blood-shot and staring, were distended widely. This exhibition now thoroughly alarmed Blair, who exclaimed:

"Man alive! what has happened? Speak. Are you paralyzed? Are you dumb?"

For answer, Brandt hurriedly grasped his wrist, bounded from the chair, and ran to the window. Here he found his voice, for he fairly screamed:

"Look! Look here—see!" pointing down the street at a man who was walking rapidly away.

Blair followed with his eyes the direction of the other's finger, and instantly he, too, started, paled, was agitated.

"Can it be?" came from his lips, in husky accents. "Do I dream? Friends! no: I am awake. I am not mistaken. That form!—that step!—it must be!—it is *Victor Hassan!* Doctor, by the cross of England—" but he addressed empty air.

The physician had dashed wildly from the apartment, and presently Blair saw him emerge from the front entrance, and walk excitedly after the object that had caused their mutual alarm.

The Englishman paced back and forth, his arms folded, his brow darkened, and glittering eyes bent upon the carpet in meditative mood.

"Did I not help strike him down with my own hands?" he mused. "Did I not help dig his grave, place him in that grave, and cover him over with earth? What, then, is this but a delusion? But I saw him, I am sure of that; Brandt saw him—silly fool, and he is nearly become a raving lunatic in consequence. What has he gone after him for?—to be discovered, arrested, implicate both of us, and wind up all our well-ordered scheme in a crushing overthrow? 'Sdeath! I wish I could have detained him.'"

Hallison Blair, though astounded, was not of a temperament to lose all composure. He reasoned as he walked to and fro.

Perhaps as much as half an hour went by when Brandt made his reappearance.

The physician's face was pallid as that of a corpse.

"It's he! It's he, Lord Hallison! What shall we do?"

The picture of abject fear, unbounded terror, which was presented in Doctor Brandt, for a moment forced a smile to Blair's lips. But this was supplanted by an expression of supreme contempt.

"Doctor Brandt, you are a fool."

"A fool! You think I am a fool because I am excited? You should tremble, Lord Hallison—tremble as with an ague when you realize that Victor Hassan, he whom we thought dead, is alive, well, here, in London, stopping at the — Hotel."

"How do you know, positively, that it is Victor Hassan? How do you know that he's stopping at the — Hotel?"

"I know it is he, because I saw him with my own eyes. I know he is stopping at the — Hotel because I followed him there. Oh! Lord! what is to be done?" groaned the terrified man.

"Sit down, and cease this nonsense," commanded Blair. "Are you a timid child? You are playing the deuce to perfection. Sit down."

Brandt obeyed with a moan.

"Now," continued the Englishman, also seating himself, "the first thing to be done is to stop this tomfoolery. Calm yourself at once, so that we may converse rationally."

Brandt finally mastered his excitement, and looked at Hallison Blair despondingly.

"You saw Victor Hassan in the flesh, and followed him to the — Hotel?"

"Yes. I even ascertained the number of his room, and found that he had registered under a fictitious name."

"And that name—what was it?"

"A most singular one—Lord Victor Hassan B."

The Englishman leaped from his chair and became greatly excited.

"What!" he cried. "What!—repeat that."

The physician did so, and, to his surprise, Lord Hallison began pacing to and fro in an unwonted manner.

"Might I ask what is the matter, Lord Hallison?"

"Matter? Matter enough! But, never mind, it is no business of yours," and he continued, musingly: "Strange, strange—what *can* this coincidence mean? *Lord Victor Hassan B.* What can it mean?" He checked himself abruptly, and, turning upon Brandt, said: "It is unnecessary for us to give ourselves any anxiety in this matter. It is simply lucky that we are so providentially thrown on our guard."

"But what are we going to do?"

"You shall see," replied Hallison Blair. "If I were so easily upset, as you, by trifles, I don't see what we would do."

"Trifles!"

"Never mind. No more of it. You shall learn ere long what course I propose to adopt," and a sinister light gleamed in his dark eyes as he pulled the bell-rope. In answer to the summons a servant stood in the doorway—bowing low.

"Come, sirrah! enter the room and close the door. Why do you stand there? Shall I break every bone and muscle in your miserable body?"

With commendable alacrity, the man closed the door and advanced a few steps, reluctantly, as if he momentarily expected some misdeed to meet him half-way.

"Mark me. Do you know where is situated the National Gallery?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Close by to it you will notice a restaurant, or wine-saloon. Go there. Look about you, and you will observe a man who wears a broad sombrero and a cloak; has black hair and mustache, and eyes of a corresponding color. Speak to him guardedly; let no one who may be loitering near catch your words. Say to him that Lord Hallison Blair desires to see him without delay. If he chooses to follow you, then conduct him to me. Do you understand my wishes?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then make haste upon your errand. Or shall I make you bear a note to him, telling him to send you in pieces the moment he sees you—good! he's gone," and as the servant disappeared Hallison resumed his walk up and down the room.

"Who is this man you've sent for?" asked Brandt, when they were alone.

"Hal! hal! hal! he's not a man—he's a fiend, a devil, a Satan in the garb of man. For twenty pounds I could bribe him to quarter you, and feed your bleeding body to the Thames. Hal! hal! hal!"

Gulick Brandt felt an icy shiver creep over his frame.

"But don't be alarmed," added the Englishman, "I shall not bribe him to that end. I have other plans."

The afternoon was then well advanced, and twilight shades were deepening into night ere the servant who had been dispatched to Trafalgar Square returned. When he came he brought with him the man to whom he had delivered Lord Hallison's message.

Blair knew this, for the reason that, even in the room where he and Brandt were seated, the hall-door was distinctly heard to open, and shut with a bang, and in a second thereafter, was audible a growl, something like the grumble of distant thunder, and the

servants could be heard running away from the vicinity of the front entrance.

"What does that mean? Some one has forcibly entered your house—perhaps a drunken man."

Harrison Blair smiled.

"No, doctor; it is all right. You shall see, presently, the man I sent for."

In a few minutes a heavy footfall was heard upon the stairs. The Englishman waited expectantly. Doctor Gulick Brandt was silent in his surprise. Unannounced, as if he were owner of the palatial residence, this strange visitor burst open the door with hardly an effort to turn the knob, and roared:

"*Dios!* but it is a more tedious way up here to the rooms than all the walk from Trafalgar Square. My legs tire with having to mount so many steps, and I'm in a r-r-rage of impatience. By the bald head of his holiness the pope! turn your house down side upward, my lord, that I may reach you the easier when you send for me."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BULL FIGHTER.

THIS visitor was a Spaniard by birth—as a glance at his swarthy features told; a ruffian by nature—as the flaming, leering eyes betrayed; by profession a bull-fighter; by name Diego Perez; the bravo, the rough, the man who eluded and defied the authorities by day, and prowled, shadow-like, at night, committing daring and successful burglaries under cover of the darkness.

He was tall, broad, heavy; muscular as a gladiator; attired partly in the costume of the Spanish arena, and partly in the more civilized style of English, while over his arm was slung a long sable-hued cloak. A loose blouse was thrown carelessly open at the front, as also was a colored shirt of woolen fabric, exposing a massive, hardened chest, and from an inner pocket hung the stock of a pistol. His great hat was pulled down until it touched the knotted, bushy brows, and underneath the latter two glaring eyes, black as coals, with the glister of a dagger, flashed defiance and insolence upon the beholder. His lips, like those of an angry mastiff, drew back, presenting long, strong, snow-white, regular teeth that grated and gritted till one's blood fairly curdled.

In all, he was just such a character as would, by his towering build, murderous visage, immense strength and heavy, grinding voice, strike terror to the timid heart. Having delivered himself, as we have seen, he strode forward and appropriated the easiest chair he could find.

"You should be introduced to the public by means of the theater stage, Diego," remarked Harrison Blair, arising and proceeding to close the door—which office the bull-fighter had neglected.

"Devils seize the theater, and its stage, too!" snarled the ruffian, doffing his hat, and brushing back the matted locks from his forehead. "My stage is the gallows; and the hangman will introduce me to the public some day."

"I sent for you, Diego, to say that I have something for you to do. But I see that you are cross this evening."

"I am cross at all times. I am like a dog—mad at every moment of its life, so that when it bites, though it played with you like a kitten, its tooth is poisonous as if it raced about with hydrophobia."

"There is wine on the table. Drink, and wash some of the fire out of your brain."

"Obliged to you, my lord. Feed fire with fire, and let us see the effect," so saying the Spaniard raised the decanter to his lips, and guzzled a long draught. He looked upon the tiny wine-glasses contemptuously. Satisfying his thirst, he set the decanter down, smacked his lips in a lively way, and returned to his seat.

"This is a friend of mine, Diego, whom you have never seen. This is Diego Perez, doctor."

"Doer of odd jobs, and attender of cut-throat affairs for his lordship," chimed in Diego, with a nod of his shaggy head; "how d'ye do?"

Brandt merely bowed. He was studying the man before him, and the result of his conclusions was—a villainous, treacherous rascal; an individual addicted to vicious habits; yet, withal, just the fellow to rid you

of an enemy either by knife-thrust or bullet, when money was to be the reward.

But what did Harrison Blair want of such a person? Wait. We shall see directly.

"Well, Diego, you are a great villain—do you know it?" said the Englishman.

"Yes; I know it. In Madrid I fought bulls, drew their warm blood with a trusty sword. Here, in London—bah! one must depend on his brain alone; must fight men with cunning. It is dull for me, this bleeding of purses, and plundering of rich houses, and hum-drum fiddle-faddle at the gaming-saloons, where I am rich to-day and poor to-morrow, by turn. I am sick of it. I want to use steel."

"Perhaps you will have a chance to wet your rusting blade, ere long, Diego."

"Poh! I wish I could believe it. Men avoid me. They shrink from a quarrel with Diego Perez, because he is revengeful as a hyena, strong as an ox, and deadly as a cobra di capello. I would I were weaker, that they might fear me the less, and seek a difficulty with me when I call them liars, fops, cowards. You know the young Viscount Berkley?"

"Yes, I know him well. I won a thousand pounds from him a night or two since."

"So? Well, I spit upon him last night, before a host of others, as cowardly as he. He grew red in the face, and his rage burst out, but he said nothing to me. I even offered him a knife, and dared him to a fight—agreeing to whip him, myself unarmed. But he fled—ran away like a yelping dog that had been kicked. Ha! ha! ha! I laugh when I think of the sorry show he made. But you said I might have an early chance to color my knife-blade. What do you mean? Say your say in a bunch, my lord, and not in little dribs, or you will tire my ears to catch a meaning. If there's bloody work, say so—and where's the money for it?"

"I will be brief as possible. I have work for you to do—work which, if well performed, and you should be discovered, would send you first to jail and then to the gallows. It is dangerous and bloody. Now, do you understand me?"

"*Dios!* yes. As for the work—if it pays—"

"It will pay handsomely."

"Good. As for the danger. *Madre!* I can face it. Discovery I fear not. Tell me what to do, and pay me well, and may Satan seize the pope if there happens a botch in my task!"

"You see, doctor," said Blair, turning to the physician, "this man will do anything I desire, simply for the asking."

"And good pay," quickly corrected Diego, with a growl.

"Of course," acquiesced the Englishman, and the bull-fighter pursued:

"Come, come; what is it I am to do? It is full dark outside, and I live a long ways from here, where Madge Marks has a supper waiting for me ere this. Whatever you have to say must be spoken at once."

"You know where the — Hotel is?" questioned Lord Harrison.

"Yes," with a snarl.

"There is stopping there," continued Blair, "a young man, who has registered himself, 'Lord Victor Hassan B.'"

"I know that," interrupted Diego. "I happened in at the office, not thirty hours ago—primped like a band-box dandy, and waiting to see a rich gentleman, who owed me check-wager—and to pass the time I glanced at the book on the counter. I wondered who, in the fiend's name, Lord Victor Hassan B. was. I have not heard of him. But go on; what of him?"

"He is my enemy."

"You have a great many, my lord."

"True. But this one, deadliest of all, is beyond my reach."

"You mean that I must deal with him?"

"I do. And so does my friend here, Doctor Gulick Brandt."

"Yes," assented the physician, "we want him removed from our path."

"That I see plainly," said Diego; "so it is settled. But the pay is the the thing now. How much money, my lord? My pocket is drained. It is a deep one, and it needs filling."

"I'll give you twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds!" and the two words were ground between the Spaniard's teeth

like corn in a mill; while his tone was sneering, contemptuous, sarcastic. "You will pay me twenty pounds to rid the world and you of an object that hurts nobody? How generous! How liberal! Bah! a dozen times, bah! I would not raise my hand to strike a squalling cat for such a sum. Twenty pounds! Think of it! *Dios!* have you a mind to beggar yourself? Seriously—this will not do. Twice, nor thrice that amount will not do. Make it a hundred pounds, and our bargain is done."

"I was only feeling you, Diego," smiled the Englishman; "we are willing to pay you a hundred pounds, if you will swear by the Virgin to rid us of this enemy. Is it not so, doctor?"

Brandt assented, and the bull-fighter said: "I swear by Satan!—not by the Virgin. for the oath would not bind me. When we pray, we pray to the Virgin; when we curse, or swear, or make oath, it is by his majesty, the devil."

"Either or both, Diego, it makes no difference to me. Will you do your task for the hundred pounds?"

"Yes," with a grunt.

"Are you sure you know your man?"

"Yes," with another grunt.

"Then kill him, Diego—kill him! Don't let him escape you. I will pay you half your money now, and the balance when your work is done."

Lord Harrison Blair arose, and going to a large secretary, opened a drawer which contained the book of his bank account. Tearing out a blank, he wrote a check for fifty pounds, and handed it to Diego Perez.

"There it is," he said. "You can draw it at leisure. When you are ready to report to me the fact that this 'Lord Victor Hassan B' is no more, another like it awaits you. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, I am satisfied, and obliged to you, my lord," and the bull-fighter carefully folded, and placed in a pocket, the check he had received.

"Now, Diego Perez, be sure you do not fail," spoke Gulick Brandt, at this point.

"Fail!" was the quick, savage rejoinder, and the accent, the tone, the force of utterance, was so unexpected that the physician started. "Fail, did you say? Wherefore should I fail? Do you see me? Can you read me? Do I look like a man who would fail? He who suggests failure to Diego Perez makes himself my enemy, and I'd crush him beneath my foot as I would a poisonous spider! Fail indeed!" This speech was followed by a hiss from the lips, a grinding of the teeth, a knitting of the brows, and Blair glanced at the physician in a way that conveyed the words:

"Be careful. If you make him your enemy, it were better for you had you never been born."

"When will you go about this thing?" asked the lord.

"The sooner the better, I imagine. Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I will be off," saying which, he got up and walked toward the door.

Lord Harrison was about to follow the bull-fighter, when the latter paused abruptly, and said:

"No need to trouble yourself. I can find the way out."

He quitted the room; they heard his heavy step in the entry; then he descended the stairs, and an indistinct roar came to their ears as the servants were heard scattering before him as they had when he came in. The front door banged, and silence reigned.

"He is gone," said Blair.

"And I am glad of it," added the physician. "I half fear him, even though he is pledged to do us a service. I should tremble for my life if I met him in the dark."

"You would have cause to, if he knew you carried money about your person. You did wrong in suggesting a failure to him. I saw by the glitter of his eyes that he was slightly angered. Perhaps it will amount to nothing, though. I know how to deal with him. I picked him up in a gambling-saloon, a half-starved wretch—fed and clothed him. He has been a handy tool ever since. When I am in a difficulty from which I cannot extricate myself, I send for Diego Perez, and he adjusts it to my benefit. He is feared by

all with whom he mingles. You have seen him in a tame state. When you behold him enraged, boiling with passion, then you hear the roar of a lion, the yelp of a wolf, the cry of a panther; see the battling of a Bengal tiger. I have seen him whip a dozen men, though every man held a cocked pistol, and feared to discharge a shot at him. He is a bloodhound, fierce and terrible, when money is the incentive; and if Victor Hassan escaped our first blow at his life, he will not escape the second. He is doomed from this hour! But how strange it seems to me, that he was not killed!" and Hallison Blair fell to musing inwardly

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD MADGE.

THE bull-fighter wrapped his heavy cloak about him, and hurried on through the streets, turning numerous corners, and anon passing through courts and alleys, in order to make his homeward route the nearer. As he walked along, he muttered half-aloud, cursing the distance that was necessary to be traversed ere he could partake of his evening meal. Alternately mumbling and swearing, with his eyes fixed upon the pavement, he abruptly came upon three men who stood before the entrance to a gambling-hell noted for its richness of interior and flourishing business.

At sight of Diego Perez, one of the men said to his companions:

"Here comes the Spaniard now."

Though it was not intended for Diego's ears, he heard it and instantly paused in his walk.

"Well, it is I. What then?" he demanded. "Have you aught to say?"

One of them, a young man of not more than twenty-five years, but whose features indicated dissipation, stepped forward, saying:

"So Diego Perez comes to try his luck at cards again to-night, eh? Are you possessed of considerable money that you wish to lose?"

"The first is a lie! The second is impudence! Are you suited in my answer, Viscount Berkeley?" and Diego gazed with open contempt upon the slenderly-formed, foppishly-attired individual who addressed him.

But he perceived that those who were with the young viscount were not of his own rank. They were men with bearded faces, dark features, dark eyes, muscular limbs; and seemed as if waiting for a word from him who was evidently performing the part of spokesman.

When the bull-fighter had measured these men, and bestowed a searching glance upon the viscount, he muttered, while his hand glided to the pistol beneath his blouse:

"There is mischief in this. Here is the fellow I spit upon last night. He feels sore yet from the insult. He would have satisfaction. These allies are hired to attack me. Let them try it. If I lay hands upon them, I shall crack their brainless heads together till they ring like bells.

"Your answer is not a suitable one considering our stations," continued the viscount.

"Then make what you like of it. As for stations—pah!" snapping his fingers independently, and then he pursued: "What do you want of me? You were waiting for me—you address me—and yet you say nothing. If this is all, stand aside! I am hungry, and want my supper."

"And who said we wished to exchange words with you, bragging Spaniard?"

"Said, or unsaid, I see you hesitate in something, noble coward."

"Hear how he talks!" cried the young man to his companions.

"Then why do you waste time with him? At him now!" was their simultaneous rejoinder; and, as they advanced upon Diego, the viscount dashed forward with upraised arm.

Quick as thought, though with apparent ease, the bull-fighter caught the young man's arm in a vise like grip, and placed the cold muzzle of a pistol to his temple.

In the same moment, one of the others came upon Diego's rear, struck him a blow on the head, and, while staggering under its

effect, the pistol was wrenched from his grasp and discharged.

The bullet cut a hole through his sombrero.

At first, the Spaniard was surprised at this unexpected promptness and success of action; and for a brief space they clung tenaciously to him, hammering him with their fists, yet striving, in vain, to bring him to the ground.

Then there was a growl, he shook them off, vented a loud roar, and laid about him with all the telling force of his enormous strength.

Whiz! thug! The Viscount Berkeley found himself spinning like a top out into the center of the street, where he sprawled, full length.

The attacking party were strong, but they did not know their man.

Diego Perez kept his word.

He knocked them down as a careful player will a set of nine-pins, and when they scrambled up, he sent them to the earth again—his ponderous fist cutting, and circling, and darting horizontally through the air like lightning streaks, and with irresistible precision. With every sweep of his brawny arm there issued from his lips a grunt.

Seizing a favorable opportunity, he grasped his assailants, one in each hand, and at a jerk, brought their heads together with a stunning crack.

Pausing to bestow a kick upon the viscount, who had returned from his first experience and was about to renew the attack, Diego Perez uttered a hoarse laugh, and, picking up the pistol, which lay at his feet, started off at a slow pace, glancing over his shoulder to see if they dared to follow him.

When the Viscount Berkeley could collect his scattered senses, and found breath to speak, he raved at the men who had suffered in his employ; called them fools, cowards; tried to bribe them by rich offers to pursue the bull-fighter. But they shook their now half-crazed heads, and muttering maledictions on the fate that had led them into such a plight, slunk away.

The viscount entered the gaming-house.

In a dark, filthy, and naturally uninviting alley, which branched off from one of the more secluded thoroughfares, was situated a dingy-looking, dilapidated building termed a house. It was the home, the abode of Diego Perez; occupied by himself and an old hag, known to the neighborhood as Madge Marks.

This woman, being somewhat connected with our story, must necessarily be introduced to the reader; and, therefore, we look into the habitation, select its chief and best room, which is, at most, a dirty den of foul odor.

A candle burns upon a table; beside it sat a bowl and plate, and knife and fork, as if the arrival of some one was momentarily expected; while she who baked the coarse bread, and made the muddy coffee, sits before the hearth, gazing silently into the smoldering embers.

Madge Marks was a woman of masculine build; a hag of ugly mien; disagreeable to look upon, for, about the corners of a toothless mouth, were yellow streaks, which told that she chewed snuff. Her features were wasted and wrinkled in flabby seams. The comb and brush were strange to her thick, black and wiry hair. Her eyes, small, jet-black, still sparkled and flashed like the orbs of a serpent, and the fire therein bespoke an evil nature—one much to be feared.

She feared neither man, beast, God, nor devil. She loved liquor, and was addicted to fits of drunkenness, in which none could manage her but Diego Perez.

She was sober now. She sat there, reflecting, absorbedly, upon something, which, in all probability, was—nothing.

Presently the door opened, and a man entered. It was Diego; and as he drew up a chair to the table, he cast aside his hat and cloak, growling, at the same time:

"Here I am, Madge Marks, and starved to madness. Where is my supper?"

"It's a sorry meal to-night, Diego," returned the hag, as she proceeded to place the rough fare before him.

"Well, well," he said, and the voice seemed to issue from the very pit of his stomach. "good or bad, I am starved, I say; and if it be not so good as what I oftentimes

get outside, I shall eat it nevertheless. So give it to me," and his capacious jaws were soon hard at work.

Suddenly, Madge cried:

"Hal Diego, what's this on your sleeve—blood?"

"Yes, blood," he replied, indifferently; as he raised the beer-mug to his lips.

"And how came it there?" she continued, interrogatively.

"Why do you ask? You seek to pry into my actions always. I am tired of it. Keep your peace."

"Tell me how the blood came upon your sleeve," persisted Madge Marks.

Diego finally told her of his fight in the street; and at the conclusion of his explanation, she shook all over, as she laughed in a harsh, sepulchral way. Suddenly, however, she sobered down, and asked:

"But what were you doing at the mansion of Lord Hallison Blair? We bargained to keep aloof from him, you know."

"Look at me!" bellowed he. "You see me? Do you read me? Am I one who would tell all his secrets at the asking?"

With this, he turned again to his repast. But Madge screamed in his ear:

"Devils on earth! am I a baby, that you think I'll prattle them about like a brainless child? Tell me your business with the Englishman—if you had any."

"I had none," was the Spaniard's brief answer, hoping to end her curiosity.

"Now you are lying, Diego Perez. I see the falsehood in your face—read it in your words."

At this, he started up, and raised his great fist to strike her. Madge Marks flinched not, but looked him steadily in the eyes, while she sneered:

"Strike! Strike if you dare! You know me better than to do that," and there was a deep significance in the banter which caused him to pause in what he was about to do. Grumbling in a dissatisfied way, he resumed his seat, and she resumed her importunities.

There was one person who knew Diego Perez, and did not fear him. There was one person whom the bull-fighter would not injure by insulting word or angry blow. That person was Madge Marks; and whether it was that her glance, her speech, her action awed him, or that he feared her, from some secret, inexplicable cause, was a question which the Spaniard himself could not answer.

"Will you tell me—surly wolf!—what business appointment you had with his lordship?"

Perceiving that she would not cease to torment him, he related the bargain he had entered into with the Englishman; and concluded by saying:

"The money is all mine this time. No half for you. So let that end our talk about it."

He expected her to cry out for half the money immediately, but, to his surprise, she remained quiet for a few seconds, her eyes bent upon the bare floor. Then she looked up, and said:

"You must not do this deed, Diego."

"Not do it!" he roared, in astonishment. "Hol! what's the matter now? Has Madge Marks joined the church? Has she reformed?—become a cackling preacher on the vice of murder? Bah! let me alone! This is my affair—not yours. Keep your peace."

"Diego, I say you must not do this deed," repeated the hag emphatically.

Diego Perez was, at first, astonished. Now he was bewildered. Hitherto Madge had always been with him, heart and soul, in every plot or scheme to obtain money. Here was a chance for him, and she protested against it! What meant this sudden change in her nature? Why must he forego his promise to execute that for which Lord Hallison Blair had agreed to pay him so liberally?

"Look at me! You see me? Do you read me? Am I one to be deterred from an object wherein lies money? Here is a hundred-pound chance."

"You must not do this deed," said Madge Marks, again, her emphasis of speech more marked than before; and then she mused aloud, though it was apparent that she did not speak for Diego's benefit: "What's this I hear? Diego to kill him? How strange! It's a long way back—yet my brain is good."

for it—twenty-five years—no, twenty-eight. Twenty-eight years since Sal, my sister, brought me the babe. It was three years old then. Sal's dead now, I guess. I have not heard of her for nearly twenty years. I saw her *once* after I came back from America. Can this be him?—Lord Victor Hassan B.? They called him Victor Hassan. I called him Vic. till I cut away from him. But here is Lord Victor Hassan B. Diego is about to kill him. What if it should be the child? I would save him; not that I care for him an atom, but because I hate the usurper of his rights!—I hate the man, the son of my sister, who revels in wealth that is not his. This must be prevented."

CHAPTER XIV.

EXPLANATORY.

IF we would keep matters in hand, it is now necessary that we turn back a period, and ascertain how it was that Victor Hassan was not killed, as his enemies supposed; how it was that he escaped from his secret grave—a thing which would seem both miraculous and impossible, when we consider how carefully he was buried in that grave, in a box, with the lid fastened down, and heavy earth packed upon it.

It is also essential that we follow him after his delivery from death to see why he was registered on the books of the — Hotel, in London, as Lord Victor Hassan B.

The young man was merely stunned, unconscious, yet in a state so nearly bordering on actual death that his would-be murderers were completely deceived.

When they left him they considered him dead; while, even as they ascended the stairs leading from the cellar, their intended victim was slowly recovering his senses.

When the heart resumed its regular beating, the blood its natural flow, and the faculties asserted their sway, it required considerable effort to recall the past, and having done this, his thoughts tended to a realization of the present.

Where was he? He reached out his hand; to the right, it came in contact with rough wood; to the left, it encountered a like substance; overhead was the same; he was lying, prostrate on his back, on hard boards.

"What can this mean?" he exclaimed; and the hollow, choked, sepulchral tones of his voice alarmed him. He noticed that his respiration was heavy, despite himself; he was cramped, though he could raise his arms above his head; no sound came to his ear; all was hushed, fearfully still.

The atmosphere grew warmer; he breathed heavier, and as the moments passed, there came before his strained vision red and yellow flashes of light, and moving spires of blue and green, studded with golden, flaming dots.

The time flew by. He kicked at the wooden covering above him; he hallooed; he pounded with his fists, until his knuckles were sore and bleeding, and his voice hoarse and unnatural. All in vain. After every cry, every effort to release himself from his strange, dark, horrible prison, there came the same ominous, mocking silence which maddened the brain and checked the pulsations of the heart.

Suddenly he comprehended his situation, and he trembled in ungovernable horror. He was buried alive!

He cried out afresh, kicked the stronger, pounded the more determinedly; but only to experience a result similar to that which had attended his former exertions—fatigue, alarm, despair. Finally, he sunk back, helpless; the hot air grew hotter. Then came a ringing in the ears, as if numerous drums and cymbals, at a long distance off, were rapidly approaching in hammering, rattling, clashing discord.

He gasped for breath. His senses spun around as in a maelstrom, he was falling back to insensibility, and thence, perchance, to death.

But, at that critical moment, he caught the faint sound of a step directly over his head. He was seized with new hope, new strength of voice and limb. He cried out with despairing energy:

"Help! help! help!" and immediately heard a voice exclaim:

"Mercy on us! what's that?"

"Help! help!" he shouted. "It is I. I am buried alive! Here!—underneath your feet."

There was a timid scream, and some one answered, in female accents:

"It's Mr. Victor Hassan! Where are you, sir? I'm frightened to death—"

"Kate! Kate! don't you know me? I am here!—buried right under your feet! I am suffocating—dying!"

"Land's sake! it's a ghost!"

"No, no, no; it is I—Victor Hassan. I don't know where I am, except that I am in the ground, underneath your feet. Help me out—quick! or I shall die."

Though frightened half out of her wits, when first attracted by the voice of appeal, which seemed to issue from the very bowels of the earth, the girl finally mastered her superstitious feeling, and comprehended that there actually was a live mortal beneath her, covered up by the new, damp earth.

As Victor renewed his urging, she grasped a pick, struck into the ground with all her strength, and had the satisfaction of hearing it strike a hard substance.

Then, alternately using shovel and pick, the lid of the box was at length exposed, and torn open, when Victor Hassan dragged himself out into the pure air.

"Land's sake!" exclaimed his deliverer, throwing aside the implements which she held, and quickly assisting him—for he tottered weakly, under the sudden, joy-giving, life-preserving change.

"Land's sake! Mr. Victor, how *did* you ever get buried there?"

"Get me some water, Kate—quick!" in a husky, failing tone.

At one side were sundry shelves containing wine, and hurriedly procuring a bottle, she handed it to him, as a substitute for the beverage he asked.

To break the neck, and drink the stimulating liquor in eager gulps, was but a moment's work, and he immediately felt invigorated by the draught.

"How in the world did you get in there, Mr. Hassan?" pointing to the grave; "and—gracious me! you are covered with blood."

In as few words as possible, he told her how he had been holding conversation with Hallison Blair in the arbor, when he was suddenly struck a blow which rendered him insensible; and how his mind had been a blank, until he awoke to a realization of his living tomb.

Throughout his explanation, the girl listened attentively and in amazement.

"Now, Kate," he concluded, "you must say nothing about having rescued me. Be sure and keep silent. I have a great object."

"Oh, to be sure! I won't say anything if you don't want me to."

"But, how happened it that you so providentially came here?" Victor continued.

"There! that reminds me of my errand. Mr. Blair sent me for some wine. I expect he'll be angry at my staying so long" and as she hastened to select a couple of bottles from the shelves, Victor said, inquiringly, and at hazard:

"I suppose Hallison Blair has already made himself a sort of master about the Home Mansion?"

"Yes, sir, he has. He and that doctor seem to be doing whatever they please. I don't know anything—I suppose it's all right, though. It must be—"

"But it is not, Kate; and I hope to be able to show that to you, before a great while. I think there is a piece of villainy going on."

"Laws!"

She was moving away, and he added:

"I shall remain here. Do you perform your errand, and then return to me. When you come, bring some water, so that I can wash the blood from my face."

The girl took up the candle, and he was again enveloped in thick darkness—but how different from that which had shrouded him so recently!

He walked to and fro over the level earth, stretched and exercised his arms and limbs.

It was this occurrence, this discovery of Victor Hassan, which caused the hesitation of speech in Kate, the waiting-maid, when, after a long delay, she entered the presence of Hallison Blair and the physician, bearing

the wine on a salver, as was mentioned in a previous chapter.

When the Englishman dismissed her, she procured basin, water and towel, and hurried back to the cellar.

The young man washed his face and hands, cleaning them of the bloody stains; and he bathed his bruised head—for Brandt had struck him with a hard weapon of some kind—a heavy, convenient piece of wood, no doubt—which left a blood-sore welt.

"What time is it, Kate?" he inquired, as he finished with the towel, and turned to her.

"Why, it's after dark!"

"And it was nearly four o'clock when I stood in the arbor," he mused, aloud.

"Didn't you go home after the funeral, Mr. Hassan?"

"No, I came directly back to the mansion, in hopes of seeing your mistress, Pauline. But I could not. They said she would see no one; not even me."

"Ah! my poor, dear young mistress," she said, sadly. "She takes on dreadful about her dead father. And you, too, Mr. Hassan; she's sighing your name all the time."

"She is? She is?" he asked, eagerly. "What does she say, Kate? Tell me."

"She wanted to see you very bad, sir; and that's why I think it's so queer that the servants wouldn't admit you."

"More villainy!" he thought, "for Hallison Blair, beyond a doubt, gave the orders to the servants as coming directly from their mistress. The day of retribution shall come!"

"But, sir," interrupted Kate, "if you didn't go back home, you must be hungry. Shall I get you anything to eat?"

"Can you do so without betraying that I am here?"

"Oh, yes; easily enough," and she started up the stairs.

When she returned, she carried a small waiter, set with plates of nourishing food, and carrying in one hand a hat.

"I thought maybe you might need this"—handing him the latter article—"so I brought it."

A barrel served him as a table; and Kate stood beside him, holding the light, and listening to his disconnected but more minute explanation of his situation.

The food, aided by mere wine, generous wine—

"For if you do but taste

'Twill make your courage rise—"

of which there was a plenty, soon restored to him his strength; and he signified a desire to depart instantly, as something of momentous import demanded his prompt attention.

"How can I get out without being seen?" he asked.

"Wait," was the reply, "and I'll go around and open the cellar window."

When she had done this, and Victor clambered out into the fresh air of the world, he delivered a further admonition that she should say nothing whatever concerning that which had transpired; and thanking her with all the sincerity that filled his grateful heart, for having preserved him from a horrible death, he left her, saying:

"Good-by, Kate. You have saved my life, and I shall never forget it. I hope I may be able, some day, to reward you as you deserve."

"Good-by, Mr. Hassan," and he was gone.

Victor went out to the road, where he paused a few seconds, and appeared to be resolving something in his mind. He soon arrived at an inward conclusion, for he started off, saying to himself:

"Yes, I must not delay. I am, more than ever, convinced now; and my nights would be sleepless if I neglected this. I must walk the whole distance, I suppose. But go I must!" and he quickened his pace. The road was dark and deserted, and he was not walking toward the city.

At the end of a mile, his ears were greeted by sound of wagon-wheels in his rear, and he halted, exclaiming:

"How fortunate! Here comes a wagon, and perchance the driver goes somewhere near my destination."

There was a loud whip crack, a

up!" and the vehicle was nearly abreast of him.

"Hold on, friend!" cried Victor. "Stop a minute."

"Hello!" returned the man, suspiciously, though reining in his horses.

Victor advanced, and the other grasped the small end of his cowhide whip, as if he distrusted this intruder upon his solitary ride.

"Which way do you go?" continued the young man.

"A considerable distance. Why?" was the reply and question.

"Do you go anywhere near Laurel Hill burial-grounds?"

"Right past the gate—why?"

"I am glad to hear that: for I have to go there, and I hope you will take me in the wagon with you."

"That's a fact! It's a right smart tramp," murmured the countryman.

"Will you take me in?"

"Yes—I guess so."

No more was needed.

In a brief space, Victor had gained the seat, and as the horses were whipped up, a lively conversation ensued, much to the stranger's satisfaction, who was glad to have found so agreeable a companion.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE DREAM-BOOK SAID.

THE superintendent of Laurel Hill cemetery, a fussy, genial old bachelor, of nearly sixty years, sat before the large lamp on his center-table, in the small house on one side of the great gate, when he was startled from an absorbed perusal of a book by a loud summons at his door.

"Now, what's that, I wonder?" and as he jumped to his feet, very much like the nobleman in "Bianca, or the Magic Sword," when stalking skeletons came to dine with him, we see the title of the volume he has been reading—"Book of Dreams."

"Who's there?" he demanded, timidly, as the knock was repeated, and half faring to open the door immediately, lest some grinning ghost, in white shroud, might leer upon him from the darkness outside.

"Let me in," was the response.

"Now," he concluded, confidently, "that's neither a specter nor a walking devil—why? Because it speaks with mortal tongue. So, now, I'll let you in, whoever you are."

Having thus assured himself, he advanced to the door, turned the key, and slid back the bolts, of which there were a number; intended no doubt to shield him from prowling spirits, in the hour "when graveyards yawn."

Victor Hassan entered; and the superintendent bowed, bent, smiled, and said:

"Ah! good-evening to you, sir. This is unexpected. People do not often come here at night. Take a seat, sir."

The young man did as requested, and when the worthy watcher of coffin holes and tomb-sunk ground had carefully relocked the door, and also seated himself, Victor addressed him with:

"Your name is Kraak, I believe?"

"Yours truly—Simon Jeremiah Ebenezer Kraak. At your service, sir," and the time-worn countenance was overspread with an open smile.

"Mr. Kraak, I have come upon important business."

"Ah! now here's my dream out. My dream! I dreamed that somebody came to see me in the night—a very dark night—and made me dig graves. Ha! I must look at my book and see what this signifies; for, here is a visitor, and a dark night, and—well, that's half, anyhow," and he took the book from the table.

"Mr. Kraak, I have no time to dally. A life depends upon immediate action."

But S. J. E. Kraak was quietly determined to know the meaning of his dream; and as he turned over the pages, he said:

"Now, young man, you may be one of those who don't believe in dreams, or that dreams go by contraries—"

"I believe neither," interrupted Victor.

"I tell you you are wasting valuable time. Listen to me."

"But I, you see," continued the superintendent composedly, "believe exactly what you dream must come to pass. Ah! here it

is. Here's what the book says of my dream. Hear this: 'He who dreams of visitors coming in the night—if they come to meet him at a church, or at a bedside in sickness, or at a graveyard—may depend that something strange is brewing.' Do you hear that? Something strange is brewing. Further: 'If that comer ask of the dreamer to perform a singular task, it may be believed that fearful discoveries are in store.' Do you hear that? The book is by a reliable author, and consequently—"

"Are you done with this nonsense?"

"Oh, yes. That's all. Something strange is brewing, for here is half my dream out, you see. Now, young man, what is it you have to say?"

"I am about to make a singular request."

"Oh, that means 'fearful discoveries.' What can they be? But go ahead."

"You buried in these grounds, to-day, a gentleman named Calvert Herndon?"

"Yes, yes, true; I did. He was a good man, too. I knew his reputation, but I never saw him. He had a fine coffin."

"And that coffin enclosed a live man, Mr. Kraak."

"Eh? What? what?" cried Superintendent Kraak, in astonishment, and not fully comprehending Victor's words. "What's that you say, young man?"

"I say that the coffin contained a live man. That is, I strongly suspect so; and Calvert Herndon is now in a living grave."

"Lord preserve me! what's all this? Singular request—fearful discoveries—something strange brewing—I'm frightened, I am. You're jesting. Young man, do you drink? You've guzzled too much. Your head is upset. You've wandered from home. You'd better return as soon as possible," and then, in hurried thought: "Living grave! Not dead! What can he mean? I shan't sleep this night!"

"I am in full possession of my senses," returned Victor, calmly. "You must go with me to Mr. Herndon's tomb; the wicket must be opened and the lid of the coffin removed, so that we can satisfy ourselves, beyond a doubt, relative to my suspicion. If there is any responsibility in the case, let it rest on me. I am well-known in the community."

The grizzled hair on Kraak's head stood on end; his eyes widened like expanding bubbles; he had scarce breath enough to exclaim: "Lord in Heaven, hear this!" and he looked blankly at the composed features of his visitor.

"You have heard my business," (and Victor arose from his seat); "now, put on your hat, light your lantern, and come with me."

"Yo—yo—young man, you are mad!" brokenly ejaculated Kraak.

"Bestir yourself, Mr. Kraak, if you would aid in a good deed."

"But this is lunacy!"

"It may be wisdom."

"It isn't! It isn't! I say it isn't! To go and take a body from the tomb? To walk among the graves? Horror! Not wisdom, but absolute lunacy, this is!"

"Will you be quick, or must I go alone?"

"Alone! Would you dare to go alone?"

"Positively, yes."

"Suppose we should be seen—but you are crazy!"

"I am not crazy, Mr. Kraak. I am bent upon a good purpose, and I am determined. Will you light your lantern, and come with me to the tomb of Calvert Herndon?"

"To the tomb! Good Lord! what am I to do?" cried the startled man, more to himself; "he will go in spite of me. I can't help it. Yet, he is crazy! An escaped lunatic! An inmate of a near mad-house, broken loose—"

"Will you hurry, Mr. Kraak?" interrupted Victor, moving toward the door.

"No—that is, yes. Stop! I'll go with you. I must go. I must guard my grounds from injury." And then to himself again, as he took the lantern from its pin. "Oh! oh! guard them I must, though I wish they could take care of themselves. Lord! what shall I do? Yes, yes, I'm coming. I'm in a shiver. He's a strong man, and I'm so old and weak. And he's mad! I must humor him—coming right away, your most Royal Highness—that'll please him. I shall die of fright! Here is my dream. I'm doomed!

Alone with a madman! Suppose he should strangle me! Yes, your worshipful grand self I'm ready."

After much delay, and superfluous fumbling, the lantern was arranged, and Victor said:

"Now, have the kindness to lead the way, and endeavor to act sensibly."

"Yes, I'll act sensibly. Of course I'll act sensibly. I am calm; I am collected; I am with you in this wild—no, no, no—this most excellent idea." And aside: "I must not let him see I am excited. He'll strangle me. A madman! An escaped lunatic, etc.—What's that? Oh, it's only a tombstone. Lord! Here we are all by ourselves, in a lonely grave-spot. I'm dying with fear. What will he do next? Perhaps take a fancy to dig up all the graves around here! Good Heaven! and I can't help it. I can't help it! This way, noble price—this way."

Victor smiled. He readily comprehended the other's state of mind, but said nothing, and followed after the man, whose knees were quaking in very fear and horror.

When they paused before the small iron gate to the tomb, Superintendent Kraak mustered strength to say: "Please consider, sir, what we are about to do. What if some one should see us? They would shoot us for body-snatchers. Shoot us! Think of it! A cold piece of lead tearing through one's flesh—Oh! Lord! don't go any further. Don't! Come back to the little house."

"Open the wicket," commanded Victor, somewhat sternly.

"Ye—ye—yes. Certainly! anything to oblige you. Heaven preserve me! here's an end to us both! There you are, king of the world, and unrivaled sharer of the universe. Enter."

As the young man was about to step past the superintendent, he was struck with a sudden thought. He paused, and by the lantern's dim light, narrowly scanned Kraak's features. They were legible as printed pages.

"He wishes me to enter first," he resolved, mentally, "and then, when I am in, will close and lock the wicket, thus making me a prisoner. Then he will arouse the neighborhood, if he can find any one, and proclaim me a lunatic."

He almost laughed aloud when he read this intent in the face of the affrighted man, and stepping back, said: "You will go in first, Mr. Kraak."

"Now then, I'm a dead mortal!" groaned Kraak, within himself, as he hastened to obey Victor's command; for he concluded that any delay would insure his instant death.

Keeping close watch upon the other's movements, Victor advanced to the trestle which supported the coffin containing the body of Calvert Herndon.

"Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" cried Kraak, while his limbs trembled, and the hair upon his head fairly raised. "You'll arouse all the fiends, goblins, phantoms, etc., of the other world. Oh, Lord! let us go away from here."

"Silence!" rejoined Victor; and the superintendent obeyed him, while he shook as with an ague, and rattled the lantern in his hand.

Victor produced his knife, which was, very fortunately, something more than a mere penknife, and opening the large blade, proceeded with considerable effort to turn the coffin-screws.

While thus engaged, both distinctly heard a smothered groan.

Victor uttered an exclamation, and redoubled his efforts; while Kraak became whiter, more fearful, trembled till his teeth chattered.

"I told you so. That's the voice of the devil! We're done for! Heaven receive my soul! there it is again! Oh! oh! Why was I born? Why did ever I accept the Superintendency of the Laurel Hill, with its graves, and its tombs, and its dead bodies, and the consequences of this horrible night! It's my dream. Something strange brewing; fearful discoveries. Lord! there it is again."

There was another groan came to their ears, hushed, faint, yet audible; seeming to dwell in the air, issue from the earth, exist upon the lips of a sepulchral invisibility.

At last the first piece was removed and turned down upon its hinges.

Though Victor Hassan expected it, though he was prepared for it, he drew back quickly, a shuddering thrill pervading his system.

Kraak stooped; the hat fell from his head; his mouth opened; his eyes distended; the astounding discovery they had made, for a moment wrought such amazement in the superintendent, that his senses of fear were paralyzed; he gaped at what he saw—motionless, pale as a ghost; holding the lantern mechanically, for, in truth, he forgot it was in his hand.

Wrapped in white, gauzy shroud, the features immovable and of a deathly hue, Calvert Herndon gazed upon them, from his coffin, with an unearthly expression. The bloodless lips moved—but they uttered no sound; the eyes closed wearily, the head turned upon its narrow pillow of satin, there was a deep sigh, then a hushed surrounding. Kraak was completely overcome, and, letting fall the lantern,

Kraak struggled to his feet, and stood gaping, staring, bewildered, as if powerless to stir; but aroused by the young man's impatient tone, he hastened back to the house at the gate, to procure the water, scarcely conscious of what he did.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RESURRECTION.

WHEN Superintendent Simon Jeremiah Ebenezer Kraak returned to the tomb, Victor had removed the whole coffin-lid, torn away that portion of the shroud which confined the hands, and the latter he was rubbing and chafing.

Receiving the pitcher of water which Kraak brought, he poured some of the cooling liquid upon the merchant's face, and profusely bathed the pallid temples.

"He is alive," whispered the superintendent, as he gazed in an awed manner at Victor's proceedings. Now that he saw there was life in the body, he no longer, upon reflection, considered his companion crazy; but waited anxiously, assisted cheerfully in

of my dream out. Something strange brewing; fearful discoveries, etc., etc., etc. And now, young man, you see, I am more firm than ever in the belief of dreams. So! Now we'll get this gentleman from his horrible bed. Ugh! what a predicament he has been in!"

They gently raised Herndon from out the coffin, placing him upon his feet, and supporting him. When they led him a step forward, a cry of pain was wrung from his lips, owing to the stiffened condition of his limbs.

Victor and the merchant embraced. Their eyes were humid with tears, and their voices choked. It was a picture—the rescuer and the rescued, two men, within a tomb, clasped in each other's arms, weeping like children; while Kraak stood to one side, holding the lantern, whose flickering ray was an auxiliary to the impressive solemnity of the scene; and the superintendent's face was expressive of deepest feeling: the eyes that had so recently started wide open with terror, now half-closed to check the sympathetic



BRANDT ROSE AND WALKED TO THE WINDOW. HE SIMPLY WISHED TO SEE PAULINE DRIVE OFF IN THE OPEN BAROUCHE.

he sunk to the stone floor in a semi-conscious state.

Victor Hassan had been correct in his suspicions. It was no delusion when he thought that he detected upon Calvert Herndon's lips, as the latter lay in his coffin at the Home Mansion, a slight moisture; but it was a fact now proved. There, in the tomb of the dead within the sacred precincts of final bodily rest, the lips were seen to move, the eyes to gaze—not vacantly nor staring, but with the light of life; the head was seen to turn; and as the atmosphere began to act upon the skin, a perceptible blush suffused the cheeks.

Fortunately, Victor recovered himself in time to snatch up the lantern, which, but for his prompt attention, would have been extinguished. Setting it upright, carefully upon the flags, he again plied his knife-blade to the screws, working with all the rapidity capable to his energy, at the same time crying to the superintendent:

"Get up, man, get up. Don't you see Mr. Herndon is alive? But he has fainted. Rouse yourself, quick, and fetch some water!"

the operation to restore Calvert Herndon to consciousness.

Their persistent endeavors were at last rewarded. The merchant opened his eyes, and exclaimed, in a weak voice: "Victor, God bless you!"

Then, as he caught sight of the pitcher, he started to a sitting posture, and outstretched his hands toward it in eager pleading; while Kraak, totally unprepared for such a movement, sprang backward, as though a grinning skeleton or hungry ghoul were about to grasp him.

Victor did not permit the rescued man to imbibe too copious a draught, lest the reaction might prostrate him, but slowly satiated Herndon's thirst to an extent which he deemed proper.

"More, Victor, more!" he cried.

"No, Mr. Herndon; too much will injure you. Come—let me assist you from your unpleasant position," and as he thus spoke, how his heart throbbed! How the warm blood coursed through his veins! He had saved a precious life.

"Lord save me!" exclaimed Kraak, as he came forward to assist; "here's the whole

tear which trickled in a hot line down his cheek.

When the first mutual transport was in a measure lulled, they would have entered into explanations then and there; but Kraak said:

"Come, gentlemen, it's a bad omen to spend time talking among the dead. My valuable dream-book cautions against that. So, we'll go back to my little house, where you can talk as much as you please. Come."

Before leaving the tomb, Victor readjusted the coffin-lid; and then they went out, closed and locked the iron wicket, and continued slowly toward the house at the entrance gate—Herndon supported by them; one on each side.

When they reached the house the superintendent produced some wine and edibles from a well-larded closet, and set them before the famished man.

Herndon appeased his hunger and thirst, and at the conclusion of the impromptu meal, a suit of clothes was furnished. A few moments sufficed to change the merchant's apparel from that of the dead to that of the living; and, though still very weak and pale,

he gradually regained something of his old vigor.

Then ensued a lengthy conversation and explanation. The merchant told his terrible suffering when, awaking from an insensibility he could not account for, he found himself within the suffocating confines of a coffin. Kraak sat silent, marveling. His mouth opened wide; he leaned forward as if fearing to lose any portion of the recital; his eyes were now enlarged with wonder, as they had been with fright when Victor forced him to the tomb.

Victor Hassan also told his story, narrated his experiences, and brought charge against Hallison Blair for all that had transpired. He made known how the Englishman had declared that Pauline was his, on account of change of determination on the part of her father, ere the latter died, and concluded by denouncing Lord Blair as the author of all the evil done.

Herndon reflected over the matter long and silently, and was forced to the conviction that Victor's suspicions were well founded—that it must be Hallison Blair who had perpetrated all this foul work.

"But come," said Victor, after a considerable pause, "what shall be our course now? Hallison Blair must certainly believe us both dead. What shall we do?—face him at once?"

"No, no, Victor; let us wait," and the reply was half-involuntary, as though the speaker was thinking deeply; "I am very weak after the trying experiences I have passed through. My brain is confused. Let us wait awhile. We must now feel our way, for an enemy so unscrupulous would still find means to accomplish his ends if he were to suspect of our existence. He has, doubtless, so covered his tracks, in this desperate game, that, even now, we would be thwarted if we should confront him. I am now resolved upon one thing—to give the villain an opportunity to consummate the villainy he has plotted, that his ruin may be overwhelming. It is the only way, I am convinced, by which we can convict the scoundrel, and convict him I will, at any cost. But secrecy and silence are now all essential, if we would succeed."

"I feel that this is the wisest course, if we would give the villain his deserts. But oh, think of Pauline's position! Can we not communicate with her?" Victor spoke with great earnestness.

"We'll see. My heart is heavy for her, but we'll make her happy yet, my boy!" and the merchant clasped the young man's hand fervently.

Victor sighed. To wait now was agony, but prudence approved the merchant's suggestions; and so it was resolved to seek a secret boarding-place—to let events develop, and to act as the future should determine, but always to be watchful.

So, dispatching Kraak for a cab, the two men bade the superintendent adieu, at early dawn, and driving to the house of Herndon's old servant, they were, by six o'clock, safely domiciled under the wondering but happy old servitor's roof.

But both men had counted too much on their own strength, for the reaction, after so much excitement, followed; and so utterly prostrated was the merchant that a low fever set in, and a lethargy succeeded which gave Victor the keenest anxiety, and for two days he never left the bedside. A physician was then summoned, and he pronounced the case one of complete nervous exhaustion; absolute rest and freedom from excitement was his only hope.

Ah, how weary passed the hours to both father and lover! but, had they known all that was transpiring in the Home Mansion, not even that sick couch could have held them prisoners.

The old servant, having been commissioned to watch over the Mansion and to act as spy on Blair's proceedings, kept the two men apparently well informed, and thus, in a measure, allayed their anxiety; but the simple-minded old man was no match for such secrecy and art as Lord Hallison Blair could practice, for he learned nothing of the projected marriage of Pauline, and was astonished, one day, to see a party proceed from the Mansion to St. Paul's, whither he followed it, and there learning what was to

transpire, flew to the sick-chamber to apprise the merchant of the proceeding.

It was a terrible announcement.

"What? Pauline to be married to Lord Blair?" fairly screamed Victor.

"So the usher told me; and all the servants were there!" said the old man, sadly.

"Oh, Heaven! is this the end for which that villain has plotted?" moaned the merchant, as he sprung up in his bed and attempted to arise. Reaching the floor, he staggered, then fell heavily, overcome with excitement.

"On the bed with him, James!" cried Victor. "Tell him I am gone to the church," and away the frenzied young man went, little caring who saw him, or what might happen.

He reached St. Paul to behold the crowd at the door blocking up its entrance. To get in was impossible, but on the hushed air came the words, distinct and solemn: "I pronounce thee man and wife, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen!"

"Too late! Too late!" groaned the young man, as he stood there like one stupefied. "Oh, Pauline! Lost to me—lost!" He struck his hand to his half-crazed forehead. "The vulture has seized the dove, but I will throttle the vulture and save her yet! Yes; lost to me, but she shall not perish."

He was aroused by the pressing backward of the crowd. The usher was opening the way for the bride and groom to pass down the aisle to the carriage in waiting. To act now with prudence was an instinct. Drawing forth his memorandum, the young man penned a few words, tore out and folded the leaf closely, and pressing up to the footman of the carriage, put it in his hand.

"Give this to the lady as she passes into the carriage will you? Here is something for your trouble."

The footman, beholding a five-dollar gold-piece in his palm, smiled, and responded with alacrity: "Certainly, sir; with pleasure, sir!" and Victor hurried on over the way to witness the end.

The bridal-party came forth; Pauline was passed into the carriage by Lord Blair, but her veil caught, as by accident, in the carriage door-knob, and she paused to dislodge it. It was the footman's ruse to get at her hand, into which he slipped the little piece of paper, and Victor's message was safe in her keeping.

Did she know it was a message from her mysteriously-absent lover that she clasped it so fervently, and looked so inquiringly into the footman's smiling face?

The carriage rolled away, and Victor, with a heart as heavy and yet as hot as molten lead, hastened back to the sick-chamber of the now doubly-bereaved father.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER DREAM.

BACK again in London.

In a quiet section of that vast, overgrown metropolis of the British Empire was situated a neat cottage, owned by a widow lady, whose needle and spare rooms were her sole support—the latter generally being let to students who sought the quietude and privacy of the locality in which to pursue, with more ardency, their studies.

At a certain date subsequent to the occurrences set forth in our last chapter, there were three upper rooms in this cottage engaged and in use by four Americans, who, for reasons of their own, preferred the humble accommodations provided here to the blazing luxury of a hotel.

It was the close of a fine day, the diamond stars, in myriad number, peeping from their cerulean canopy in merry twinkles, and the bustling widow had just come down stairs, after having carried the lamps to her guests.

In one of the rooms, seated with his elbows on a table, his chin supported in his hands, and eyes fixed steadfastly upon the pages of a book, was a man whose small stature, spare features, grizzled locks, and genial expression of countenance, at once introduced our bachelor friend of Laurel Hill Cemetery, Simon Jeremiah Ebenezer Kraak. The book in which he appears to be so obviously absorbed is his favorite Book of Dreams; though, as he sits, seemingly so interested and lost to his surroundings, his

mind does not dwell wholly on the printed lines. At least, his eyes have rested, for the last five minutes, on the same word, and a train of thought was flashing through his brain, something like the following:

"So I, Kraak, once a young man, now an old man; once a poor man, then a rich man; then again poor; and at sundry times in my blest bachelor state, first a school-boy, then a clerk, then a cook—luckily it was that I learned to cook when I was a boy—at times doing nothing, at times doing something, alternately nothing and something, somehow, with somebody, and again with nobody, for in my youth, my accommodateness in everything made me valuable; finally a superintendent of graves, a watcher of ghostly flocks, a protector of inanimate flesh from the claws of thieving body-snatchers—I, as I said before, am reduced to a rather odd and enjoyable situation. Here I am; and that's good enough. My board is paid; I've nothing to do; I shouldn't complain. I don't complain, I won't complain. Mr. Herndon—silly man to spend his money on me—has promised me idleness and ease for the rest of my old days. I am simply to swear that I saw Mr. Hassan get the old gentleman out of a coffin. Swear that I saw it with my own eyes. My own? Of course! how could I see with another man's eyes? Umph! Why couldn't I have stayed in America and done this? Isn't there plenty of paper, envelopes, stamps, ships, mails, etc., etc.? But there's where I'm a fool again! I'm better off in England than in America; not that there is anything in the change of air, mode of law, or the like—I've heard a great deal of talk about 'dear old England,' and that sort of thing, but what does it amount to? Shucks! Spoiled shucks, at that, as soon as you get there! It isn't like America—the home of freemen, the haven for warm hearts and true souls, a generous refuge from the pricking malice of a royal despot, the fortress to defy the world; ah! me! my country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, etc., etc. But it's because I've no marble slabs, and pointed monuments with imitation angels to guard; and when I go to sleep, I don't expect to wake up and find an unrested dead body perambulating at my bedside. I knew by the dream I had that something was going to turn up, and it has—it has! Lord! what strange things have happened since I had that dream! That reminds me, by the way, I was looking for an explanation of the dream I had the other night. It was a very queer one, I think. Let me see, now, what my book says about it." And rousing from his meditation, he whisked the leaves over in search of something which seemed determined to elude him, and which something, he was sure, was to be found in his valuable Dream Book.

In another room, we find the tidy, pretty-featured Kate, the waiting-maid, who saved Victor Hassan's life at the Home Mansion.

Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan are seated, conversing, in a third room at the home of the widow.

"We have done nothing yet, Victor."

"No," returned the young man, "nothing at all," his tone low and thoughtful, like his friend's.

"And you have seen Pauline?"

"Twice," was the reply, and Victor's face wore a pained expression; "once, I saw her on the drive at Hyde Park; a second time, passing through this very street in her barouche."

"How did she look, Victor? Did she see you?"

"No; she saw me not. Her appearance—alas, my heart throbs when I recollect; for I could not see in Lady Blair the sweet, gentle Pauline, who was once mine. Oh! how my brain whelms with grief!"

"Cheer up, Victor. Do not grow so desponding, my dear boy. I am tortured beyond measure, and you must aid me in retaining mental strength; for, remember, I am older than you, very many years, and besides, Pauline being my own, only, warmly-cherished child, my agony of mind is no less, if not more than yours. We shall strike our brow ere long, and crush the villains who have wrought our mutual misery. We shall, at least, see meted out that punishment so justly merited by the wicked. Come, bear up."

Victor arose from his chair.

"Let us go out for a walk, Mr. Herndon. I must have some fresh air. I am nearly choked in this confinement. Will you go with me for a short stroll?"

"Yes, yes. I need a draught of the pure air, too. We will take a walk—"

He did not finish his speech, for, at that instant, the door opened, and Kraak rushed into the room, carrying the Dream Book in his hand, and his face betraying a high state of inward satisfaction.

"Here! Here!" he cried, jubilantly. "Look! Listen! I've found it—here it is! I knew it was here. I always find it here. I've got it! I—!"

"What, Mr. Kraak?" inquired Victor, while he and Herndon found it impossible to refrain from smiling.

"Why, my dream, of course," answered Kraak. "Here it is!"

"Your dream?" interrupted Victor. "We were unaware that you had had any recent vision."

"That's a fact," realized Kraak. "I didn't tell you of it. Well, then, you must know that, night before last—"

"The evening we had the wine in our rooms?" inserted the young man, suggestively.

"Ay, that was the night," assented Kraak, not seeing the point. "I went to bed rather late, you know—hem! rather late—but, then, that hadn't anything to do with it! I fell asleep in my chair. I dreamed there were a great many packs of cards—all alive! Do you hear that? All alive! And these cards were dancing about, making faces at me. The 'aces' were funny things with funnier heads; and the 'tens' were rats and spiders, and all that sort of thing. Do you hear?—rats and spiders! Mind. They all jumped—the cards did—trying to break their pasteboard necks; and then settled down to pairs, playing euchre. I was playing, too. We played and played, and I was losing all the time. I looked up, and *who* do you suppose I had for an adversary? But, hear this!" (Reading from the book.) "'To dream of cards is an unlucky omen.' Do you hear? *Unlucky!* Further: 'Though this may, in a measure, depend upon the kind of an antagonist you should have.' Antagonist! Mind, now! 'If he or she be good looking, you may surmount the difficulty in store; but, if he or she be coarse, rough, ugly, you may safely depend upon a trying experience.' Hear? If your antagonist is ugly, you'll have hard times. Now, then, we're going to have hard times. Why? Because my antagonist was anything but handsome. In fact it was Old Nick, Satan, the devil himself, with horns, fins, claws, cloven feet, etc., etc. Don't you see what's coming? And now, what are we to do? This will come to pass; my Dream Book says so, and it *never* lies."

The ex-superintendent walked to and fro in tragic style, his eyes bent upon the paragraph of valuable information, reading and re-reading, as if resolved to commit it to memory, "unmixed with baser matters."

Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan had found Kraak, with his eccentric moods, and ridiculously grave faith in dreams, intermixed with a humor that never was reduced to absolute seriousness, a pleasant relief to the dull monotony of life which existed to them always; and it was their aim to encourage, rather than be given to fault-finding with the bachelor. So that, on this occasion, they affected a serious consideration of his discovery, lauded the promptness of the Dream Book in explaining dreams, visions, presentiments, and promised to take steps guarding against the impending calamity.

This fully satisfied Kraak, and leaving him to more minutely analyze the vision and its signification, they went out for the stroll which the ex-superintendent's unceremonious advent had delayed.

As we stated at the opening of this chapter, the section in which was situated the boarding-house, was a quiet one; and now, as they left their rooms and entered the street, there prevailed a pleasant air of solitude. They walked slowly and in silence, each wrapt in meditations of his own, and half regardless of the direction they pursued, only intent upon their reflections.

A few blocks were gone over in this manner, when, as they passed beneath a street-

lamp, they were recalled to a sense of the present, by something that flitted before them, quick, hasty, without a pause, and uttered a slight scream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MARVELOUS REVELATION.

THAT which darted past our friends, Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan, so suddenly, so abruptly, like a phantom, was the figure of a woman, whose startled cry and eagerness to flee from them at once arrested their attention.

Her flight was a short one. She seemed exhausted, for she clutched at the iron railings before a near house, and then sunk down upon the steps, where she lay motionless and hardly discernible in the gloom.

As they reached her, she uttered a stifled groan, and moaned:

"Oh! don't take me! Don't! I was not begging. I—!" she evidently imagined them to be policemen, for, happening at that instant to mark their civilian garb, her tone changed, and she continued:

"Oh! sirs, pardon me. I am starving—dying! Give me food. Give me something to eat!"

"My good woman," began Herndon, but she interrupted him with:

"Charity! Give me food! I am dying!" and her voice grew fainter rapidly.

"She is dying!" exclaimed Victor.

"Yes, yes. Oh! give me food!" wailed she.

"This will never do," Herndon said. "She must have nourishment. Poor beggar!—strange that the authorities will not provide for you better than they do. But, where can we get you food? We are strangers here."

Raising her arm with an effort, she pointed toward a shop window on the opposite side of the street; but her voice failed her. Victor immediately ran across to the place indicated. On his return, he found a cab standing where he had left the merchant.

"Here, Victor," called Herndon, from the interior of the vehicle. "We are in here. Hurry. She's gasping."

"Give me food!" brokenly pleaded their charge, so strangely dependent upon their bounty; and the young man, as he got inside, and took his seat, handed her two loaves and some wine that he had brought. The driver closed the door, and mounting to his box, drove off.

"Where are we going, Mr. Herndon?" Victor asked, glancing at the starved woman, who was savagely munching the bread, and as eagerly gulping the wine from the bottle—almost checking her respiration.

"To take this woman home," was the merchant's reply. "While you were gone, she told me where she lived, and entreated me to take her there. I thought we could not neglect her—she is in a pitiable condition; not having tasted food for nearly four days; and, besides, she is stricken with disease. The driver has his directions."

The carriage rolled on through the streets, a silence reigning among its occupants, unbroken save by the sound of eating and drinking made by the woman, who, to judge by her actions, must, surely, have been without anything to eat for fully the length of time she had averred.

So occupied was she, devouring the food, and drinking the strengthening wine, that she could find no words in which to thank her benefactors.

They stopped shortly before a miserable hovel located in a filthy alley, and where an impenetrable darkness shrouded them.

"Do you live here, my good woman?" inquired Herndon.

"Yes, yes; help me into the house. I—I'm dying—dying—dying."

They assisted her out, and Herndon supported her into the crumbling dwelling.

As Victor turned from the cabman, with whom he had been settling, the latter said:

"I'd advise ye to be cautious, mister. This 'ere's a bad neighborhood; an' that old hag what's got ye here ain't too good to let ye off 'thout some harm, or the likes—mind now, I tell ye."

But, though the caution would have been, as a general thing, valuable to one unfamiliar with the countless modes adopted by shrewd villainy for the perpetration of crime,

in this instance it was not required, for the reason that she whom they had brought there was dying, through dread disease and gnawing hunger.

When the merchant entered the foul-smelling room inhabited by this woman, she tottered away from him, and he heard her fall upon what he judged, in the darkness, to be a straw mattress.

"There's a table in the middle of the room," she said, feebly. "And there's a candle on it and a tinder-box. You can strike a light. I am dying."

Herndon groped about him and finally succeeded in lighting the miserable dip of tallow.

The woman lay upon a ragged mattress in one corner, of what they discovered was a most wretched apartment. Everything denoted poverty and misery.

"What can we do?" asked the merchant. "It will not do to leave her alone, fast sinking as she is."

"I hardly know," hesitated Victor, removing his hat to wipe the perspiration from his brow.

Before they could speak further the woman uttered a stifled exclamation, and pointed her long, skeleton finger at the young man; while her haggard features became more deathly in hue than they had appeared in the first glimmering of the light.

"Water!" she gasped, at length, sinking back as if overcome by a sudden excitement.

Victor sprang to a cupboard which, till then, had escaped his notice, and where, fortunately, he found an old pitcher containing water.

This he held to her lips, and sprinkled her face at the same time.

She gradually recovered from her faint, and, fixing her dark eyes upon him piercingly, cried suddenly, in a hoarse whisper:

"It's the boy!—Victor! He had that tiny mole in the center of his forehead, and the same eyes and—and—God! have I found him at last!"

She closed her eyes dizzily, and after a moment quickly said, interrogatively:

"Your name is Victor Hassan? Tell me—is it not? Say 'yes!' I know you. You are Victor!"

"That is my name," returned Victor, in surprise, rising, and going close to her, while Calvert Herndon also drew nearer.

"I knew it must be. God in heaven! this is a mercy! Young man, bare your arm!—bare it! Let me see. Is there not something pricked upon your flesh? Quick! show me."

Victor, bewildered at her mysterious behavior, complied with the request—baring his arm to the shoulder.

"Aha! there it is. There it is! You are Victor Hassan! You are the boy!" and she sunk back again upon the rough couch, laughing sepulchraly.

"Give her water, Victor—quick!" said Herndon, a burning curiosity now aroused within him to know what this forlorn being could mean.

That which was displayed upon the young man's arm was a coat-of-arms, pricked in colors, and beneath it the words: "VICTOR HASSAN."

When the woman recovered from this second insensibility, Victor found voice to question her.

"What do you mean by this? What if I am Victor Hassan? Explain yourself."

"Yes, explain your strange words," added Herndon.

"It's Victor Hassan; son of Harold, Lord Blair, Earl of —! How merciful is Heaven to ordain this before I died!"

"Son of Lord Harold Blair, Earl of —!" repeated they; together; and Victor continued: "Woman! do you know aught of my parentage? Speak."

Scanning his face with steadfast glance, she said:

"Ay, I do know of your parentage! What can you remember of your childhood?"

"Nothing," he answered, excitedly, now kneeling beside her; "not even she who gave me birth. I know when I played in the parlors of a comfortable home in America, where I called a gentleman and lady uncle and aunt. Beyond this, I cannot recall a scene. They could never tell me of

my parents. Speak, if you know—who was my father?—my mother?"

"It is the hand of God! I thought you must be dead; but I wasn't sure; and now I'm glad I got ready for this! So! it's Victor? My little Vic. that I used to dance on my knee, and sing lullabys to—how strange!"

"Will you explain?" the young man interrupted, impatiently. "You say you knew my parents. Tell me of them! Heaven grant you may live long enough for this!"

"Listen." A strength seemed mustered within her that had lain dormant till now; and seizing Victor's hand, she whispered, hoarsely: "My name is Sarah Marks. I was your nurse when you, a puny babe, kicked with your chubby feet, and struck about with your dimpled fists. It was nearly thirty-one years ago. How old are you now?"

"Thirty-one," he replied, briefly, leaning forward to catch her every word.

"Yes, that's right. Thirty-one. I told Madge, when I gave you to her, that, if she ever parted with you, to be sure and pin a paper about you, telling your name—for very few people would ever find that name under your arm—and she did it. When I saw her, nearly twenty years ago, she said she had placed you in the entry of a grand house, closed the door, rung the bell, and left you forever. She—"

"My parents?" cried Victor, too excited to calmly hear this prelude.

"Your father was Lord Harold Blair, Earl of —; and your mother was a French lady, descended from noble blood. You are heir to—to—give me some water!"

Hastily drinking from the pitcher which he held to her lips, she continued:

"You are heir to the title, and moneys, and estates of that nobleman. You are Lord Victor Hassan Blair, by birth, by the laws of England. *Your place is usurped by my son!* His name is Hallison. I did it all. Oh! forgive me for it!"

What did they hear? Victor Hassan direct heir to the title of Lord Harold Blair? Marvelous! They were mutually astounded. The young man doubted his ears. He gazed incredulously at the woman who called herself Sarah Marks. Herndon's astonishment was equal to his young friend's. Both were silent. Sarah Marks was panting for breath—struggling against the grip of death which was fast clinching upon her wasted frame.

"Woman! do you speak the truth?" Victor asked, when he could command his speech.

"Look upon me. Don't you see I am dying? Would I dare to lie in this awful hour? No, I speak truthfully. I was your nurse. I can prove what I say. I may die before I finish; but I'll try."

"Do not delay! Tell me all! Oh! I thank God for this strange occurrence, which is to tell me of my birth—my parents!"

"I have only a few moments left," said Sarah Marks. "Pay attention to what I am going to say. I will prove to you that you are of noble birth—I will tell you how to prove it to others."

More eager listeners never gave ear than did Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan to the words of the dying woman as she began her story—a story in which lay the key to Victor's birth and earlier life, and on which rested the momentous import of his future destiny.

CHAPTER XIX.

SARAH MARKS'S STORY.

"My name is Sarah Marks," she began, her tone visibly much weaker than ever; "thirty-one years ago I obtained, through the kind influence of many friends, a situation as nurse in the noble family of Lord Harold Blair; Earl of —, who was noble in character, as he was in name—generous to all, and watchful of the comfort of the lowest menial in his employ. His wife, the gentle Countess Marie—oh, how I loved her!—your mother, was as mild, as sweet as an angel, beloved by every one.

"I was called to nurse their new-born babe; and what a little jewel I thought it was, too! It was you, young man—you. How careful I was of you! How I watched

your every movement lest you should be hurt in some way! I was wrapt up in you. I idolized you; and when I took you in my arms, I was a child myself, for I used to laugh, and sing, and play, trying to get a crow from your cherub lips. And why was this? Why were you so precious to me?"

"I obtained, for my carefulness, the endless thanks of your perfect mother. And this is why I gave you such attention. I was married at the time, though nobody knew it, to a nice young man, who only waited for better times, better prospects, when we should proclaim our secret to the world, and live happily together, as only those can live who love each other fondly. God! the time never came for us to do that. The bright future we had looked forward to faded like a mist before the winds, and left dark clouds before the sun, left me a widow, helpless. But wait, and I'll speak of that presently."

"My care of you was rewarded well by the earl and the countess; and the knowledge that I was pleasing them, besides expectations of the day when my husband should take me to him openly, made my life a happy one. Oh, how happy! But I said it faded. Listen. The earl was possessed of a notion to prick your name in india-ink upon your arm, and spoke of it to your mother. But she would not listen to it; so he said no more about it, though he did not give up the idea. He did it. He placed your name upon the inner part of your arm, near the shoulder, besides his 'coat-of-arms.' I was the only one, save himself, who knew it. There it is now. There it has staid fast, indelible. Your mother never found it out, nor anybody else."

"How happy were your father and mother in their only pet! How happy was I in pleasing them! But there came a shadow. Like a foggy shroud, wrought by Satan, it came!"

"No purer woman than the countess ever graced a man's home. Yet, see what envy did. See what accursed jealousy and masked enmity perfected in the garb of hypocritical friendship. The countess had foes—sly, subtle, scheming foes—who sought to ruin her fair name, and rob her of a fond husband's love. They were successful. And these enemies were at court; they visited her house; partook of her hospitality; they smiled before, and scandalized behind her; they plotted injury to her, and accomplished it!"

"It was done through a steward of the earl's—a handsome man, with a black, devilish heart. This man was hired by gold to aid in the base designs upon the countess. Hear, now, how straight the plot was carried out."

"The earl was called away from his home, one day, on private business, and his wife was alone, as he knew. At a distant part of the city—it was here, in London—he met a friend. Friend! It was an enemy, a very devil, with his true nature concealed, and smiling face and mild-toned voice substituted. This man, this wretch, had intended to meet Lord Harold, and immediately began a prelude of apologies for expressing regrets at a certain occurrence which had recently come under his notice; and to which the earl gave wondering and confused ear. He demanded of the other to speak out his say without further hesitation. But this pretended friend was cunning. He was careful in playing his part. And when he at last explained, your father's mind was shocked, he quivered in dumb amazement, and, finally, was about to strike to the earth the devil who bore him such hellish news; but the latter, with oily speech, protected himself against the just indignation of the insulted husband. In addition, he volunteered to prove his assertions."

"Consenting, in the end, to his treacherous friend's proposal, the earl repaired, with his fiend companion, in great haste, back to his mansion. They did not enter the house, but went around to the rear, into the garden, on which fronted the windows of the countess's boudoir."

"What did they see? It was enough to palsy the very heart-beats of the most confiding man who ever shared prosperity and affliction with woman! There, seated at the window, which was open, was the earl's

steward. He was leisurely smoking a cigar, and cooling himself with a fan, and, at the moment, seeming to converse with another occupant of the room, who could be no other than the countess."

"The steward did not appear to see them, and they hurriedly drew back within a clump of shrubbery, and watched. Presently the steward started up, cast aside his cigar and fan, and exclaimed, while the words were borne distinctly to their ears:

"'Marie, you are mine! You say you are *only* mine? Then, indeed, this is bliss!' and he stepped from their sight, as if to embrace her to whom he addressed himself."

"The earl staggered; he burned to lay hands upon the foul being who dared invade the sanctity of his love for the countess; but he tottered weakly, and sunk, overcome, to the sword. When he recovered, he was alone. He looked up at the window, where had been enacted the scene to blast all faith in one who had held his loftiest confidence. The sash was closed. No vestige remained of the dreadful disclosure forced upon him. His reason must have been dethroned, in part, for I remember, when he came into the house, he appeared like one bereft of his senses."

"He retired to his room and locked himself in; and after a while a servant was summoned, to whom he handed a note for the countess. I was that servant. I went to the rooms of my mistress, and found her reclining upon a sofa, just awakening from what she and I always thought a natural slumber, and in which belief she died. I gave her the note. She read it. She read it twice, thrice; then rubbed her eyes, as if she was not fully aroused from sleep, and did not read aright; and the next moment, with a painful cry, swooned. It was the note that caused it; and these were the words it contained—they are stamped on my memory in letters of fire:

"'COUNTESS MARIE, WIFE OF HAROLD, LORD BLAIR, EARL OF —:

"'MADAM:—Accursed be the hour in which the words of a minister created us man and wife. I have lived in foolish blindness—adored at the shrine of a dissembling woman, whose lips, guileless, yet are fraught with guile, concealed beneath the charm of a studied piety and chasteness. You, the once pure angel who taught me the lesson of a husband's honor for his wife, are unmasked in all your guilty inconstancy; and while my pen shapes these lines, no fluttering heart nor sick-lover brain is mine, but a torturous calmness grasps my faculties, and a stern realization of your infidelity faces me. I have witnessed your familiarities with my steward this day, while you imagined me well removed from the opportunity of penetrating your actions. Therefore, understand me: your further presence is a disgrace to the honorable name I bestowed in marriage. Let your departure from my house be at once; or I shall abandon it, and leave you to the sole companionship of your partner in this miserable crime."

"'HAROLD, LORD BLAIR, EARL OF —:

"No wonder she swooned! No wonder her features were as if carved from whitest marble! Was it not enough to kill her? Was it not enough to crush the very soul of any woman who was unconscious of guilt or wrong? The countess was such a one. She was as pure as woman ever was! The blow was so heavy, so unexpected, that I feared she would go mad. I had never seen her grieve before. She moaned, and cried, and sobbed; and to me, who stood mately there, protested that she was innocent. I had snatched up the note from the floor, where it fell, read it, and thrust it into my bosom, where I kept it ever afterward. I believed she was innocent; I *knew* she was innocent; and I joined my pleading and entreaties to hers when she asked her husband for an interview. But all begging was useless. He was stern, cold-hearted, refused to listen, said he had 'seen enough to satisfy him,' and repeated his intention to leave the house, if she did not do so. He never wished to see her face again."

"After a time, she went. She had no relatives—was the last of a noble family."

But she had a comfortable annuity. I went with her. With tears in her eyes, she asked me to bring the babe—her dear child—*you*. I did this. I stole it from its crib, and we departed together. But I should have thought over it more than I did. I did not reflect that Lord Harold, upon missing the babe, would demand it, and, if his supposed guilty wife refused to give it up, would then carry the case before the courts, thus exposing the whole affair. I knew my mistress would shrink from open calumny; and, as I saw how attached she was to her little one, I had not the heart to take it away from her, and place it back again. Yet I loved her! Something had to be done. Hear the sacrifice I made!

"A plan suggested itself to me which I dismissed at first, but at length decided to adopt. I saw my husband and told him all that had happened, and the embarrassment I was in. He agreed to do as I proposed. Our child, whom we had had privately christened '*Hallison*,' was placed in the crib which had contained the true child of the earl. As the ages of the babes were nearly alike, I hoped Lord Harold might not find out the deception. And he didn't.

"But, before I parted with my own child, I had its name pricked upon its arm—the left arm—near the shoulder, in small letters—'*Hallison Gregor*.' That was the name of my husband—though I haven't used it for many years; in fact, it was never known that I was married at all, except by some near relations of my husband. On the other arm, and in a like place, I had pricked in still smaller letters—'*Not Victor Hassan B*.' These two marks were never noticed by future nurses—I wonder at it!—and, perhaps, no one save Hallison to this day knows they are there. My son, Hallison, now grown to a man, is called Lord Hallison, instead of Lord Victor Hassan. I'll tell you, in a word, how that happened: It was a strange coincidence. Your father wished to destroy all relics of her whom he believed unfaithful, and to that end had his supposed child's name changed, as he thought. '*Hallison*' had become a popular name about then, and, as I said, through a strange coincidence, he had it altered from Victor Hassan to Hallison, which was really its name anyhow. So the child lived. So it grew up. Always called Hallison after that—Lord Hallison Blair.

"I had hoped that everything might, at some time, be arranged happily, and the separated man and wife be rejoined. But a chain of events quickly ensued which destroyed all such anticipations.

"I learned the vile plot that had ruined the lives of two beings, through the steward himself. I found him one day, in a dirty shanty—that was what he had got down to—dying; and he confessed to the part he had acted. He had received a thousand pounds for his villainy, and fled to France as soon as he performed his share of the hellish scheme. He had administered a drug to the countess, and while she was insensible, gained access to her boudoir, where he seated himself to await the appearance of the earl in the garden. This plan had been well laid. He was on the alert; he saw when Lord Harold stood there, beneath the windows, and at the fixed moment uttered the words which so cut the husband's heart.

"But I received this information too late! When I returned to my home, I found my mistress dead! Her woe, caused through the unjust charges against her honor, and sorrow at the estrangement from one who she *knew* was deceived, had so preyed upon her that she died suddenly, a broken-hearted wife. There was no will; nor were there any surviving relatives; everything of hers was seized by the crown, with the approval of the earl; and the money she left went to charitable purposes. I was without a home, and had the care of the baby, *you*; for it was well known that, in case anything happened to my mistress, I should take care of her child.

"I took you and went to a house where lived some relatives of my husband's, and there I was greeted by terrible news—Water! water! give me water!"

She grasped tremblingly the pitcher that Victor held ready.

Satisfying her thirst, and appearing relieved of the lump which choked her throat,

she paused for a few seconds to regain breath.

The young man was impatient. He forgot her low condition, her failing strength: he considered but one thing—he was listening to a history of his birth, which had always been a mystery to him; and the brief stop in her recital chafed upon his eagerness.

"Go on, Sarah Marks; go on!" he urged. "Tell me the rest. In Heaven's name, speak!"

CHAPTER XX.

A "STUPENDOUS" CASE.

SARAH MARKS at length resumed, in a full voice:

"I said I was met by terrible news. My husband was addicted to drink. But this never marred his love for me. It proved his doom, though. While intoxicated, he had walked from a bridge into the Thames, and was drowned. By a lucky chance, his body was found by persons who knew and recognized him, and it was brought to his relatives. Although this nearly killed me, I did not forget my charge, the babe, *you*, in all my sorrow. You were closely on two years old then, and behaved nicely; and I even took you to the funeral of my husband.

"The time flew by. I lived off of the money I had saved while employed in the service of the countess. This small fund grew smaller, until it dwindled down to almost nothing; when, one day, my sister Madge came to see me—I had a sister, but I hardly ever saw her, because she lived away at the further end of the city—and she said she was going to America. I was almost a beggar then, and I could not get anything to do, so I concluded I must part with you. You were then about three years of age. I asked her if she would take you with her, and she agreed. I took you to her on shipboard, just before they set sail; and I told Madge who you were, and all about everything. I told her to be sure and pin a paper to your garments, with your name written on it, if she ever got clear of you.

"She took you and went to America. After that I never saw you, till this night, and then I knew you right away, by your remarkable resemblance to your mother, and by those two small dark moles on each side of your forehead. Madge came back again soon, and I saw her once—it was nearly twenty years ago. Maybe she has lived in London the twenty years gone; but I have never set eyes on her. My relations and friends, one by one, all died, or went away, and I was left alone without money or place to support myself. To get me a livelihood, I have done a great many wrong things. I was forced to it. I continued to live on—sometimes a charity-seeker and sometimes with plenty of money. Within a few years, though, even the vile existence I had accepted failed to be of much account. I became a thief. I was too ashamed of the low reputation I had accepted for myself to seek honest employment. Now I am dying! I have not many more moments left for this world; and I die, repenting all my evil ways; happy in thinking of how pure I was once. I never did, would not dare, to assert my relationship with the proud Lord Hallison Blair, who lives so grandly in Square St. James; I would be scoffed at, perhaps cast into prison for my boldness. But he is *my* son! He has his true name—'*Hallison Gregor*'—upon his left arm; and on his right is pricked: '*Not Victor Hassan B*.' This is all. Water! I am dying!"

She drained the pitcher to the last of its contents, and then added, hastily:

"Go! Go bring a lawyer here. Tell him to fetch pen and ink. I must sign my name to an affidavit. Be quick!"

"Where will I find one?" cried Victor, starting to his feet; "we are strangers in London. Direct me—"

"When you leave this house, turn to the left; when you go out of the alley, turn again to the left; keep up a few blocks until you reach a corner house, built of brick, with railings to the steps, long windows opening on a balcony at the front, and lighted vestibule. One of a firm of lawyers lives

there. I am sure you'll find him in. Bring him to me. I must finish this. It is the hand of God!"

Victor bounded from the room, and hurried upon his errand without waiting to hear more.

When Sarah Marks and the merchant were alone, the former said:

"Look in that trunk over there and you will find some papers. I wrote them: I wrote them all. I am not the worthless being you would take me for. I have had a better education than you would think. Open the trunk and get out the writings."

Herndon did as she requested, finding, upon opening the trunk, a large roll of manuscript. A glance at it showed him that it was an affidavit, and more lengthy statement of that to which he had listened.

"I don't know what made me write it," she continued; "but I did it at odd times, after I had been thinking a great deal. It eased my mind to place my thoughts in words. I never dreamed it would go into the hands of the very child whom I used to nurse—to the true child of the earl! It's the hand of God. He ordained that this should come to pass before I entered His presence!"

"Woman—Sarah Marks, you have given us most valuable information! This is intelligence both pleasing and startling!"

"But it's true! It's true!" she asserted, with husky vehemence.

"I cannot doubt it," he returned. "It does really seem to be a Providence which brought about this most strange meeting."

"It's true, every word of it!" repeated Sarah Marks. "I have written it all down, there, on the paper, and with my dying strength I am going to sign it. For it will be one good deed to wipe out the many wicked ones I have committed. Oh, that I could live to see again the happiness of my early life!"

"How long has the earl been dead?" inquired the merchant, still busily perusing the manuscript by the pale candle-light, though his question had no definite importance.

She answered promptly:

"It was over ten years ago. I remember the grand funeral well."

"About two years previous to the date when my wife and I first met Hallison Blair," thought Herndon.

He devoted himself to making her as comfortable as possible, considering the lack of conveniences; for which kind attention she returned feeble thanks.

As the moments passed, she began to fear that Victor would return too late to accomplish that which she desired; but, while expressing this anxiety to Mr. Herndon, the door opened, and the young man entered, flushed with the excitement of thought, and a hasty walk. He was accompanied by not only the lawyer named by Sarah Marks, but also by an Episcopal clergyman, whom he had found with the lawyer's aid. The latter-named gentleman, comprehending at a glance how matters stood, wheeled up the rickety table, placed beside it a stool, and arranging the sheets so that they could be signed successively without delay, said:

"Now, then; there you are. All ready. Come!"

"Sign the papers, Sarah Marks, while you have strength enough left," Herndon said, assisting in raising her to the stool.

With trembling hand she dipped the pen in the ink, and, amid a profound silence, attached her signature to each of the papers; and the lawyer stood by, business-like, to dry the name as fast as written, and nodding his small, shingled head in a rapid, satisfied manner.

"There!" she exclaimed, in a whisper, when she had scratched the last letter on the last sheet, "it is done! That will prove everything. I am going. Hold me!"

She tottered dizzily in her seat, and was near falling; but Victor caught her, and she was gently placed upon the mattress, where she lay like one in calm repose.

Suddenly the dark eyes of the dying woman opened—they were filming, and unsteady in their gaze; and in a voice so low that they could scarce distinguish the words, she pleaded:

"Water! Just one more drink, and then I—I—"

Victor took up the pitcher, and would have procured the water, but the clergyman laid a detaining hand upon his arm, saying:

"Stop. It is useless. She cannot live five minutes. She would be dead ere you came back. Let us pray for her," and he knelt by the torn, ragged couch, and prayed.

The others bowed their heads, in solemn accord. When they looked up, the soul of Sarah Marks was mingling with the hosts that throng the beaten path leading to the spirit realms.

The lawyer began fumbling and shuffling the manuscripts, and immediately interested himself in the affidavit, with contracted brow and mien of gravest study. He represented a most respectable firm. The worthy minister was pleased to accept full charge of the matter in hand, and was authorized to summon an undertaker, and see that the corpse had decent burial at a joint expense between the merchant and the young man; and, after giving him their directions, they withdrew to the main street, where they were fortunate enough to secure a cab, and returned to their boarding-house.

Ex-Superintendent Kraak had retired, and they were partially glad of it, as his presence might not have been so desirable under the existing circumstances.

They had no inclination to sleep; and the night was passed in conversation upon the singular and most wonderful developments so brought about as to seem hardly credible.

Early next morning, the business card of "Messrs. Blank & Blank, Attorneys and Counselors-at-law," was presented, and the lawyer was admitted.

A lengthy dialogue, statement, and explanation ensued, in which the lawyer was informed of Hallison Blair's apparent villainy, and that the witnesses were on hand, prepared to testify at any moment. Lawyer Blank evinced much interest, and began to take notes. It appeared to him an extraordinary case—a case that was of momentous import, but crystal transparency. He entertained no doubt as to their being amply qualified to thoroughly "oust" the Englishman, besides having him dealt severely with, according to law, for attempt at double murder.

"Not the slightest particle of a chance for him!" exclaimed the attorney, rapidly penciling off the more weighty points given him. "He'll go under like frosted cabbage in boiling water. Hem! Very queer complication, this. I read all the manuscripts last night. Haven't had a wink of sleep for about thirty-six hours. Sarah Marks will be buried to-day. I've attended to that; expense light—hum! no hurry about the cash, you know! How funny is this case, now! Our firm concedes it to be *stupendous*! We'll prove two murders on him, and a wife under false representations; we'll prove him a fraud on nobility; a son of nobody; a consummate scoundrel and outlandish liar—etc., etc., &c., &c., and we'll have him put in jail, in prison; exile him, banish him forever—maybe hang him! Of course this shall be kept quiet until all the documents are prepared, you know—until the machinery is all well g-r-e-a-s-e-d—then we'll shove the piston-rod, open the safety-valve, turn the fly-wheel, and run our circular saw of justice through his live-oak body. See? Right in keeping it quiet, am I not?—yes? Certainly. I thought so. There you are!"

His speech had been broken by short intervals, as he wrote rapidly, and now he closed his memorandum-book with a slap. Shortly thereafter he took his departure.

It was two days subsequent to the interment of Sarah Marks, when, in and by the approval and advice of their lawyer, Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan engaged rooms at the — Hotel for themselves, ex-Superintendent Kraak, and Kate, the waiting-maid.

All, however, were registered under fictitious titles, with the exception of the young man, whose name was written in the books: "Lord Victor Hassan B."

The residence of Lord Hallison Blair was but a short distance from the — Hotel, and on the first day they occupied their new

rooms, Victor had walked out in the direction of St. James Square, hoping to feast his eyes for a moment, if possible, upon Pauline's face. He knew she was accustomed to ride out in the afternoons; and his wish was gratified. He noticed the fine span, the elegant livery, before the Englishman's house, and well knew that it was hers—for he had been there more than once before to feast his eyes on her—the still-cherished idol—the sacred image engraven so deep in his heart that time nor effort could erase it. He saw her driven off; and then turned his eyes upward to the windows. They rested on Doctor Gulick Brandt!

He heard the physician utter a cry, saw him reel back from view, and without waiting further, returned to the hotel, where he related the incident to Calvert Herndon.

In the same moment in which Victor Hassan was telling the merchant what he had seen, Doctor Gulick Brandt was busy perusing the page labeled "Late Arrivals," in the office, down stairs; and having discovered Victor's name, he turned his footsteps, in hot haste, back to St. James Square, where he rejoined the Englishman—his features whitened, his whole manner one of guilty excitement.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOSEPH FLEET, S. S.

"Sir:—Please call immediately at Room —, — Hotel, on account of urgent business."

"Now, who the deuce can this be, who signs himself 'Lord Victor Hassan B., and wants to see me on business?'"

Thus read Detective Joseph Fleet, from a small slip of paper he held in his hand; and thus he soliloquized, as he perused his brief message.

Lord Victor Hassan B. was a nobleman of whom he had not yet heard. Lord Victor Hassan B. was a personage new to his knowledge of the lights of the nobility; and he studied the scrip perplexedly.

"The best way to decide is to go and find out," he concluded. "Business eh? It's always business with Joe Fleet. I'll see the gentleman at once," and a few minutes later, he was hurrying in the direction of the hotel.

Presenting his card, he was promptly ushered to Room —, where the servant announced him. Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan were there, as if awaiting his arrival, and the detective entered with a bow.

"Good-evening, Mr. Fleet," said Victor, arising; but Fleet paused in the center of the apartment and interrupted him, saying:

"Hold on. You sent for me on business, didn't you?"

"We did," answered the young man.

"Very good; and on business I've come. First and foremost, my name is Joseph Fleet—'Joe'—for short—some call me Joe, and some call me Fleet, while others call me Joe Fleet. Therefore, you will choose one, two or all three of the titles, if you wish; but don't call me *Mr. Fleet*. Now then, business."

The detective was a medium-proportioned individual, with heavy black whiskers; his face was pleasant, yet expressive of determination; his eyes, small and keen, darted in every direction and fixed in the mind all they saw; his manner was agreeable, though blunt; quick to perceive, as prompt to act, safe in conclusions, reliable in word; sometimes irritable, sometimes lenient—in all his moods, shrewd and decisive; not a man to be trifled with, and a man who understood the duties of his office in the Secret Service.

As he spoke, he seated himself in a convenient chair, placed his elbows on the arm-rests, let his chin fall to his hands, and crossing his legs, gazed at them in a way that partially discovered his nature.

"Now, then, to our business."

Without further ceremony, Victor proceeded to lay before Fleet his whole case.

He began with the first incident—his discovery of moisture upon the lips of Calvert Herndon, when the merchant lay in his coffin, in the parlor at the Home Mansion in America; and from this point, began a recital of everything—his own near death; his being saved by the waiting-girl; the merchant's rescue from the tomb; Doctor

Gulick Brandt's assumption of the office of executor, when the will to that effect had been destroyed, their coming to London; the discovery of Sarah Marks and her story; all was set forth, including Victor's intended claim to the hereditary title of Lord Harold Blair, Earl of —.

Throughout the whole of which, Detective Joseph Fleet paid strictest attention, and marveled not a little at what he heard. But, he was matter-of-fact, and did not dwell mentally very long upon the singular complication. He was ready to arrange things the moment Victor concluded, saying:

"Now, Mr. Fleet—"

"Joe Fleet," interrupted the detective.

"Well, as you please. Our object is, to be satisfied, to a *certainly*, that Hallison Blair, or rather, Hallison Gregor, with his associate, Gulick Brandt, *did* first bury Mr. Herndon alive, for purposes of his own; and did, afterward, attempt my life, because I was likely to unmask them. Do you understand?"

"Understand? Oh, yes; I understand that I've got a pretty difficult job. And, how the deuce am I to get at a knowledge of this thing, unless I place a pistol to my lord's forehead, and make him swear that he did do thus and so? Umph!"

He reflected upon what was before him, but presently declared himself equal to any task imaginable in his line; and then arose to depart.

"There's nothing else besides the object you've stated, is there?"

"Nothing."

"And when are you going to kick up this row?"

"Our lawyers informed us this afternoon, that they were ready at any moment, only waiting for us to explain our wishes. I replied that I should probably be prepared within a few days. I desired a delay in order to have you perform, if practicable, that with which you are now intrusted. If you cannot do it, then we must strike without your aid. If you should fail, of course a fee awaits you for your trouble."

"Good," commented Fleet. "I'll do what I can. Good-evening."

"Good-evening," returned Victor and the merchant; and the detective was gone.

Joe Fleet considered the duty in hand a most intricate one. He was half-inclined to admit that he had fallen into a desperate strait, in which his wits were at fault. He did not doubt that such a piece of villainy was probable; but, how to manufacture indubitable *proofs*, based upon actual investigation, appeared a task of towering insurmountability.

"Well," he thought, "I'll shift the matter to my brain, and sleep on it. Mayhap, by to-morrow, I'll be able to see how to work."

Upon his return to Headquarters another note was handed him.

"Now," he exclaimed, "who the deuce can this be, who writes in a lady's hand, and wants to see me on business? More business. Always business."

His question was answered when he opened the billet and read:

"Your early presence at No. —, Square St. James, is particularly requested. Ask for, and see *only*

"LADY HALLISON BLAIR."

"Oho! then, what's up? She wants me, too!—the young man's former sweetheart. What can be the matter in that direction, I wonder?"

He lost no time in answering the summons, starting, straightway, for Square St. James, and thinking deeply as he went.

Arrived before the house, he ascended the broad steps; when something fell in a shower about him, fluttering through the air like snow-flakes, only larger, confined to a certain space, and distinguishable as playing-cards.

"Hello! somebody's throwing a pack of cards out the window. He! he! he! I suppose my lord and lady have quarreled over a game of whist, and she's settled the matter by throwing the cards on my head. Lucky they weren't stones! And now, your humble servant, Joe Fleet, out of consideration for the reputation of the house of Blair, will take the pains to prevent unpleasant gossip in the neighborhood," saying which,

he carefully collected the cards that lay scattered upon the pavement, mumbling the while.

"Nice cards these. So! 'jack's' up, 'king's' down, 'queen' on her head. 'Clubs' must be 'trumps', up-stairs, where that light burns! Not 'hearts,' I'll bet a shilling!" and so forth, until he had stowed the entire pack in his pocket.

Then he rung the bell, and was admitted to the long, broad, smooth-floored, richly-decorated, brightly-illuminated hall.

"I've come to see Lady Blair," he said, briefly, pushing past the man.

"Ye-*hes*, sir," bowed the servant; "what name shall I say, sir? Walk into the parlor if you please, sir."

"Joe Fleet. Hurry."

"Ye-*hes*, sir," with another bow.

"Then hurry, and don't stand there wriggling like a man with a pain in his stomach."

"Ye-*hes*, sir."

"Be quick!—do you hear?" taking a step toward the other and frowning.

The man disappeared on winged feet, and at the expiration of a few minutes returned to find the detective, in a side parlor, pacing to and fro, lost in thought, and exhibiting a carriage of such truly independent ease within the house-walls of the proud, wealthy, exacting Lord Blair, as to astonish the menial. Besides, Fleet was indulging in a strain of broken, incomprehensible utterances; arching and contracting his brows; patting his hands upon his folded arms; evidently resolving something in his mind, and also impatient at having to wait.

"Crackey!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Joe Fleet, spying him. "Now, devils catch you! how long have you been standing there?—idiot! Stop your squirming! You set my nerves on edge."

"Ye-*hes*, sir!" only, instead of straightening up, as the detective desired, the latter expected, momentarily, to see the man's back split, and his sundered body fly in opposite directions.

"What you mean by 'Ye-*hes*, sir?' Did you see Lady Blair?"

"Ye-*hes*, sir."

"Ye-*hes*, sir," again! Well—jackass!—and what did she say?"

"That if you was a mind, to be sure—of course she'd—that's to say, *hif* you choose—I might—you—*hif* it was convenient—we—"

"Now—fool!—you've forgotten what she did say."

"Ye-*hes*, sir; I've forgot what she—"

"Ho! you have, eh? See now! I'm going to make you remember!" and the way in which he snatched up a bound volume from a table near him, said, as plainly as words:

"This book shall break your skull, ventilate your brains; aid your memory. Look out!" The action had the desired effect.

"Ye-*hes*, sir. I was about to say, sir, my lady would like to see you in her apartments up-stairs, *hif* you please; ye-*hes*, sir."

"Good. Now, then, lead the way. And stop that twisting, or I'll put a bullet through your cranium!" With this latter admonition, he followed the intimidated servant from the parlor, and ascended the stairs to the rooms designated by Lady Hallison Blair, who anxiously awaited his coming.

And, with all her changed life, seeming buoyancy, endless luxury of surrounding, had Pauline ceased to love Victor Hassan?

Considering her pure heart, gentle nature, rapt affection, would it be reasonable to suppose that she, who, in words of fervent sincerity, when she conversed with her father, declared an aversion to Hallison Blair even as a friend, should feel the happiness she simulated, and which others believed? Not so. Though she resignedly bore the cross put upon her through base design; though she displayed, by word and action, a contentment with her lot, though she graciously permitted, and appropriately acknowledged, the homage paid her on every side; still, there existed in the secret recesses of her heart a dreary, desolate something which wrought a constant but concealed sorrow.

The note she had received from the footman of the bridal carriage, on the day of her wedding, had been treasured jealously, and was stained with bitter tears that had fallen from her lustrous eyes at times when she

would seek privacy, and read and re-read the lines upon that precious fragment. It was a fond relic of one who had been "all-in-all" to her—the only being remaining, after the burial of her father, on whom she could bestow her full, undivided love, and he, in that hour when she deemed him nigh, was torn from her by a fate as cruel to realize as the will of the Omnipotent.

The words upon the hastily-scribbled note were:

"Pauline!—darling! Lost to me. But I am ever nigh you!"

Yet she had not seen him since the day on which her father was discovered dead in the library at the Home Mansion! If ever nigh, why not come to speak a welcome word? Why not gladden her sight?—exchange a greeting?—utter a word of whispered recognition? Her fated portion was the harder in this ban.

"The miserable have no other medicine, But only hope."

Amid the gay scenes, the festive throngs with which she mingled, her eyes eagerly sought for him; but, as often as she strained her vision, as often was disappointment the result; and she would cease the rippling laugh or merry speech, become silent, pensive, unmindful of the compliments incessantly showered from tongues of admiring friends.

Withal, her position as Lady Hallison Blair was maintained despite the gnawing agony of mind forever hers; and even the Englishman did not imagine the struggle constantly burning, and heroically screened, within the bosom of his calm, beautiful wife. The many drives, with showy livery, and in blazing display, were not without an object beyond mere pleasure. That object was a nurtured hope that she might see Victor—that he might see her. All in vain! He was, it would seem, held from her by a merciless decree; and the days, the weeks passed, until her suffering was augmented by despair.

CHAPTER XXII.

JOE FLEET ON TRAIL.

THAT afternoon, when Pauline went out for her accustomed drive, leaving her husband and the physician discussing their villainy, she was not long without all desirable company for one occupying the position alone hers, but in the midst of the gay throng which filled the fine drives of Regent's Park she saw not the face and form of him who was ever uppermost in her thoughts. It was pleasant to be out in the open air, away from a home whose every association was so distasteful to her, and it was near night-fall when she ordered her coachman homeward. When she reached Square St. James, the lamps before her own house had been lighted.

With a sense of loneliness and distress, she entered the gorgeous hall of her aristocratic home, and ascended the staircase, intending to retire to her boudoir. To reach her rooms it was necessary to pass those of her husband, and as she came to the door of the latter apartments, an animated dialogue within arrested her attention.

There was the voice of Lord Hallison Blair, and, once in a while that of Doctor Gulick Brandt; then there was another—coarse, rough; fierce, and vulgar in expression.

"There is registered there"—came to her ears, in the voice of her husband—"a young man who has registered himself 'Lord Victor Hassan B.'"

Victor Hassan! How the utterance of that name riveted her! She waited to hear more. What of Victor Hassan? Her heart was palpitating nervously, with a sudden excitement. For the first time in her life, Pauline played the eavesdropper. What brought Victor's name into the mouths of these men?

She drank in every word of their dialogue. Her face grew whiter and whiter, until it vied with the pallor of the driven snow. They were deliberately plotting a foul murder! And Victor to be their victim! Heavens! what did she hear? Was, then, the mask falling from the smooth-spoken man she called, unwillingly, her husband? Was she

learning the true devilishness of his nature at last?

She was a listener to the whole diabolical plot and agreement entered into between the noble, the physician, and the bull-fighter!

When the interview was concluded, and the Spaniard arose to take his leave, she was surprised at the strength which enabled her to flee from the position near the door, and gain her apartment in time to prevent discovery.

A moment's delay, now, would result in murderous consequences. A life depended upon her calmness, her immediate action—a life precious to her, even beyond her own, and she prayed Heaven to endow her with power so to act that she might save Victor—save him who was dearer than all things on earth.

A brief reflection suggested a course which, she felt assured, would prove successful. Without taking time to lay off her things—without noticing the staring maid, who wondered greatly at her mistress's agitation—without other thought than the object before her, Pauline opened her escritoire, took up a pen, and hastily wrote a line. Folding, enveloping, directing the epistle, she handed it to her maid and bade her dispatch a servant with it speedily, to its direction.

Then the time which followed seemed a tormenting delay. The waste of a single second might, perchance, result fatally, and he, Victor, would be sacrificed! The suspense was terrible, the fears excruciating, the situation well-nigh unbearable, and it required an almost superhuman effort to control her excitement and uneasiness.

At the moment when the note was delivered at the headquarters of the London police, there happened to be no member of the Secret Service on hand, and Joseph Fleet, returning from his interview with Calvert Herndon and Victor Hassan, being the first at the chief post, received the billet. As we have seen, he instantly betook himself to Square St. James, to the residence of Lord Hallison Blair—was admitted—was ushered up-stairs to a private reception-room, where Pauline awaited him.

"Lady Hallison Blair, I believe?" said Fleet, bowing politely, as he entered.

"Yes. Enter, sir, if you please. What I have to communicate is private as well as important, which will excuse my inviting you to these rooms. Be seated."

"Oh, certainly," closing the door and doing as directed.

At the expiration of ten minutes Detective Joe Fleet understood "exactly" and "precisely"—as he remarked—the business nature of his call. At the conclusion of her statements, he smiled meaningly, arched his eyebrows suspiciously, gave vent to a low whistle, and thought:

"Now, then, here's more complication! Lord Hallison Blair is going to have a young man killed; and that young man is a former lover of this young lady's; and this young lady is the wife of Lord Blair; and my lord is not the true lord; and he is a villain; and he has associated with him in his villainy one Gulick Brandt, M. D.; and, finally, I've gained a point—a heavy point; for now, I know my lord is a rascal. Good! Things progressing at this rate will show me what to do next, after I've done something first. I'll—"

"But," was Pauline's interruption to this mental summing, "I could not learn where Mr. Hassan was to be found. I know not what to do. I must trust to you, sir. You can, perhaps, find him—can you not?"

"Find him? Oh, yes. Not the least doubt of that," he returned, in a tone of confidence which caused her a glad thrill.

"Thank Heaven! I hope you are sure. When—when can you—"

"Now. Right away—in a minute—in two minutes—in a jiffy!"

Pauline would have spoken further, but Fleet, fully recognizing the urgency of the case in hand, took his departure, saying:

"I'll fix this thing all right for you, Lady Blair—trust me for it," and in a moment, bowing, he quitted the room.

The detective hurried straightway to the Hotel. He had not expected to return there so soon—in the same evening; but, with the new duty before him, of placing the young

man on his guard against a second attempt upon his life, then pending, he entered the hotel, and continued up stairs.

He had reached the floor on which were the rooms of our friends, when he was checked by an unexpected sight. That part of the house was quiet and deserted, yet the detective saw something which caused him to halt, and to remain silent.

The suite engaged by the party of four was accessible through a narrow side passage, branching off from the main hall and unlighted. There was a window at the opposite end to where Fleet stood, through which was dimly reflected the lights from the street without, and the pale stars.

But, faint though it was, it formed a background against which was discernible the outline of a man. The detective saw that it was a man of heavy build, prodigious strength, and that he was enveloped in a long cloak.

He was leaning forward—was engaged in picking the lock of a door, and that the door to the room occupied by Victor Hassan as a sleeping apartment.

Fleet did not pause to ask himself who this could be, but concluded at once that his arrival was just in time to frustrate a murderous design.

Drawing back quickly in the recess of another door beside him, he took off his boots, and then he peered out, to see how far the would-be assassin had progressed in his labor.

The latter was no longer to be seen!

"Ah!" Fleet exclaimed, as he glided along the entry, noiseless as a cat, and reached the door where he had seen the man at work.

The door was open. Passing around the jamb, he saw the intruder standing in the center of the apartment, his back toward Fleet, his eyes bent upon a couch whereon lay Victor, who had retired earlier than usual, and whose loud respiration at once told that he slept soundly.

The would-be assassin advanced step by step toward the bedside, concentrating his enormous strength to give the fatal blow. The shining steel raised and poised aloft.

"Thud!" something whizzed through the air, arrow-like, and with unerring precision, striking the wretch squarely upon the temple, causing him to stagger. Ere he could recover himself, there was a loud cry; he received another blow which felled him to the floor, and the cold muzzle of a pistol touched his temple.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TIGER PLAYS THE FOX.

We left Diego Perez in a state of mental stupefaction, insensible to an immediate realization of the unaccountable change in Madge Marks, which transformed her from the vulture to the dove. She protesting against the bargain entered into by the bull-fighter, to murder Lord Victor Hassan B. It was strange!

He looked at her searchingly; a frown settled on his brow. What interest had she in the youth whose life he was to take? Why should she interfere in his plans? What had produced this change in her vicious nature?

"Look ye, Madge Marks," he cried, "what means this turn about? Are you mad? Then hie to Bedlam mad-house! Are you a fool? Then go to the asylum! I'll have none of this baby-talk. Were you of the old Garduna with me, you would get a bath* for your weak heart! Are you so good of a sudden that you do not fear being choked in the smoke†—or that you do not fear the jaws of the wolf‡? Bah! A grand serena you would make me!"

"Diego Perez," she screamed, "you must not do this deed. Mark what I say!—you must not do it. It is no business of yours what my reason is; but you must give it up!"

"You rave, Madge Marks!" he expostulated, with a growl; "how can I well hold back now, when I am paid?"

* *Drummed.* † *Struck by the Law.* ‡ *Prison.* Terms in use among the Garduna of Spain, at the time when the Inquisition, at Seville, was in the zenith of its power. Diego had, probably, ascertained them by accident, retained them in memory, and, at this late day, introduced them in his speech as more forcible than plainer English.

"Give my lord his money. Give it back to him. You shall not fulfill your bargain if I can help it!"

"Poh!" he grunted.

Having finished his supper, the bull-fighter arose, slapped on his broad hat, and threw his cloak over his shoulders.

"Where do you go now?" questioned Madge.

"It is no business of yours. Keep your place," was the brief, surly reply; and, in a moment he had gone out; but the hag also left the miserable room, and followed close upon his footsteps.

Diego was in a disagreeable mood. He felt convinced that Madge Marks would defeat his plans if possible. He glanced back over his shoulder, to see if he was being dogged, but could discern no one, owing to the general gloom which shrouded that section invariably after nightfall.

He continued on until he arrived before a decayed ranch, where poisonous liquors and sloppy wine were the attraction for those who could only afford small investments in the vile beverages; and here he entered.

Diego was loth to partake of the fiery liquors here dispensed, yet, as there were no other shops on the by-route he proposed taking, in order to reach the Hotel, and consequently no other opportunity to obtain drink; and finally, that he desired a fiery stimulant in the undertaking he had agreed upon, therefore, he advanced to the counter and called for the best, which, at least, was no more than pure alcohol, slightly colored.

It was seldom his face appeared in this den; but the keeper knew him well, and was prompt to act so as to obtain his good grace, considering the Spaniard's strength and friendship two valuable auxiliaries to the quietude of his house.

Diego Perez gulped down the sickening stuff, and, having paid for it, turned to leave; when he was confronted by a face. It was a familiar face with a leering expression, with glaring eyes, Satanic in mold, disagreeably swarthy. The stained, withered lips were screwed up in a ghastly smile; the dark orbs flashed an unflinching stare; the owner stood there in a way that conveyed, clearly as words: "I am here!"

"Satan seize you, Madge Marks!" he cried, in an undertone, not caring that the few loiterers should catch his utterance. "What brings you upon my track?"

"You know well enough, Diego Perez," she answered, slowly, and in the same guarded tone; "I said you should not do this deed—and you shall not! I have sworn it!"

"Dios! what shall I do with you! Look at me. You see me? Do you read me? Am I to be turned aside by your crazy cackle? By the Pope's toe!—no! Then he appeared to have suddenly conceived an idea; for he continued, more mildly: "Come—drink—you have not drank since yesterday, Madge Marks."

"No; I don't want any drink. If I muddle my brain you will elude me. Ha! ha! Diego, you can't beat me at a fair game!"

"Now, my good woman," said the bartender, with an eye to business, "come, have a drink. It'll do ye good—put warmth in ye. Try a glass. There y' are, now," and he set another black bottle on the counter beside a dirty glass.

"Drink," urged Diego. "You are in a bad mood with yourself to refuse. Drink. I say, and then leave me to myself. Keep your peace."

She looked at the tempting bottle in a wistful way. Then, unable to resist her natural craving, hurriedly filled the glass, saying:

"Just one, Diego! just one, and no more!"

Her back was toward the bull-fighter, and the latter, with a quick motion, made a significant sign to the man behind the bar. The sign was answered by a knowing wink, and while Madge Marks was busy pouring alcohol down her insatiate throat, the Spaniard, without any noise, passed out through the door, and hastened along the street.

When Madge set down her glass, she turned to where Diego had been standing.

"H—ah!" she screamed. "He has fooled me! He is gone!"

"Stop, Madge, stop," said the master, as she was about to dash away, and in accordance with the silent instructions he had received. "Stop. Have another drink. Here's the bottle. Help yourself."

She paused. She glanced first at the door, then at the black bottle. She had not tasted drink for many hours till now, nor was there other prospect of procuring any; for she had no money. The invitation was irresistible. She returned to the counter, drank again and copiously, and uttering an unintelligible ejaculation, bounded from the place in head-long pursuit of Diego.

But Madge Marks was completely foiled. Diego Perez knew that, when she drank, she drank a great deal at a dose; he knew that one or two drinks would suffice to turn her brain and render her incapable of all self-control.

And he guessed correctly, for she had not walked a dozen rods before her vision grew hazy; she staggered blindly onward, forgetting Diego, his mission, her resolve to prevent it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADGE ON HER METTLE.

"Lord Hallison, will you answer an inquiry of mine?" said the doctor, after the bull-fighter had left the two conspirators on his mission of blood.

"Well," returned the Englishman, settling to a comfortable position in his chair, and lighting one of his favorite Havanas, "provided you don't search too deeply for information, yes. I will answer you. What is it?"

"I would like to know," continued Brandt, "why you became agitated this afternoon, when I returned to you, and told you that Victor Hassan was at the Hotel?"

"Oh, pshaw! it was nothing. I was not agitated simply on account of the intelligence that he was there. But it was—it was—"

"Ah! it was something else? And what was it? Will you tell me?"

"Ay, a something far more important than the mere fact of his being so close upon our track caused the agitation to which you allude. I am greatly perplexed."

"Is it, then, a secret?"

"Yes, a secret."

"Yet you may safely intrust it with me. I only ask through curiosity—nothing more."

Lord Hallison Blair laid down his cigar, and frowned involuntarily as he gazed into his lap, appearing to reflect upon the propriety of granting Brandt's request.

The physician did not note the quick, sharp look that was darted at him as the other's eyes raised for a moment, and then dropped again, instantly.

Presently Blair said: "If I were to tell you this secret, you would probably use it against me." The tone was to probe the physician's eagerness or indifference.

"Is it so momentous?"

"Yes."

"You may rest assured I shall never betray it."

"And what security have I for this? You know, doctor, we are both liable to deceit if there is benefit to accrue."

"Then keep your secret. If it is of so great a value that you would hesitate to lip it, even placing me on oath, I do not care much to know it. I should feel uncomfortable in my knowledge."

Another searching glance of only a second's duration flashed unseen by Brandt, from the eyes of the wary nobleman. Then Blair concluded, mentally:

"He does not seem anxious. He can not have a purpose of his own in seeking this. I do not fear the man! I do not think he will dare betray me. I might as well tell him. I may be wrong in so doing; but never mind."

Looking up, he continued, aloud:

"Doctor Brandt, will you swear to secrecy?"

"Certainly; though, when I first asked you the question, I did not anticipate this phase."

When Blair had bound Doctor Gulick Brandt, by a most solemn oath, not to reveal

that which was about to be made known to him, the former said:

"I'll now tell you, in a few words. It is this: *I am not the true heir to either the title or wealth of the deceased Lord Harold Blair, Earl of —, who, you know, was always thought to be my father.*"

Brandt made no remark, and the Englishman added:

"That is, I am of the candid opinion that the earl was *not* my father, for cogent reasons heretofore judiciously concealed."

"And from what do you derive this supposition?" asked the physician, during the brief pause that followed. "Besides, what has Victor Hassan to do with it?"

"Both of those inquiries I am about to explain. It is universally believed that I am the true son. The earl certainly died in that belief. I am recognized as Lord Harold's son and heir. But I doubt if I am entitled to my position. When you came back this afternoon from your half-fool's errand in pursuit of your enemy, what did you say? You said that it was the young man whom we thought dead, buried in the cellar of the Home Mansion, in America—did you not?—or words to that effect?"

"I did."

"And what more? You said that he had registered under a fictitious name—'Lord Victor Hassan B.' Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"Now, see why I became suddenly excited," and as he spoke, he took off his coat, rolled up the shirt-sleeve of his right arm, and raising it so as to expose the under part, held it to the physician's gaze. The latter saw, pricked there in India ink, each letter clearly defined: *Not Victor Hassan B.*"

"You see that, Doctor Brandt?"—rearranging the sleeve. "I have an indistinct remembrance of once having been called Victor. It must have been very many years ago; but it is still in my mind. Besides this, just before the old earl died, when he had but a few moments to live—it was about ten years ago—I went to his bedside, and asked him *why* the name, 'Victor Hassan,' was pricked upon my arm. He told me *he* had put it there, in my infancy, together with the coat of arms of his family. You noticed there was no coat of arms there; only the name. Then he told me of an estrangement which had arisen between him and my mother when I was only a babe, and which had blasted his whole remaining life, and so on. To that part I paid but little attention. And further, he said that my name had been changed when I was about four or five years old to Hallison. I was careful enough to prevent him, or anybody else, from seeing *all* that is pricked upon my arm; for this suspicion of mine has been of long existence. I asked him no more. Now, here is what makes me sure that I am not the son of the late Lord Harold Blair, Earl of —," saying which he bared his left arm, and Gulick Brandt beheld thereon:

"*Hallison Gregor!*"

"You astonish me!" exclaimed the physician.

"Do I? Well, you see, this is why the name of Lord Victor Hassan B., coming from your lips, had such an effect upon me. I know that my name was, once, Victor Hassan Blair—I had it from the earl on his deathbed. When in America, though the name of Victor Hassan was familiar to me, it never struck me as being particularly significant. But now, when the name alters to *Lord Victor Hassan B.*, I confess it troubles me. What does the 'B.' signify? Is it not possible it may mean Blair? Then, taking up my view, there is a singular combination; for the name on my left arm is 'Gregor,' and perhaps my father's name was Gregor; therefore, might not the young man who is injudiciously following us be the true son of the earl?—having lately discovered his title, by accident, and intending to push a claim? Adding everything up, the question I cannot solve is, how came I where I am?"

"Assuredly, I—"

"I do not doubt myself but that all this is highly probable. Now, what shall I infer?"

"I am at a loss—"

"Never mind—it matters little. Diego

will attend to him—he will kill him! Do not forget your oath."

"Your secret is safe with me, Lord Hallison."

"I suppose so; only guard your tongue, or it may accidentally move in a speech that you cannot control. But no more of this. Let us drop the subject."

"As you please. Though I presume I am at liberty to wonder inwardly, am I not?" meaningly, half-sarcastic; for he felt the sting of the bridle this man was wont to put, at fancy, upon his tongue and actions.

"You can use your mental faculties as you are minded," replied Blair, also significantly; "but be sure you do not speak too many of your thoughts. What say you to a game of cards? I have no engagement at the 'club' this evening."

"With pleasure," and as the physician drew his chair nearer to the table, Lord Hallison Blair went to a small stand at one side, where he procured a small box containing a pack of elegantly-glazed, elaborately-stamped playing-cards.

With this box he returned to the table, and was about to reseat himself, when there sounded a loud commotion in the hall, and he paused, as heavy, shuffling footsteps approached along the entry.

The two exchanged glances, and the physician suggested:

"It is the Spaniard."

"Not so," returned Blair; "for it is not his step. Who can it be?" If a visitor, it is strange that no servant has preceded, and announced to me the name!"

Their alternate inquiries were answered in a few seconds. The comer halted at the door, and, turning the knob with a twist and a wring, stood before them.

The first glance discovered that it was a woman, the second, that she was of disproportioned and masculine figure, with a visage of the devil, a glance of hate—an eye that leered, glared, flashed with basilisk light—a general mien of disgusting front. Her long, thick, black, wiry hair was knotted and twined in disorder; her clothes were wet, muddy, dusty, dirty, torn—as if she had rolled, first in the gutter, then in an ash-heap, finally rending her garments, as a pastime. Her poise was unsteady, as if aboard a ship at sea; she caught hold upon the door-jamb for support; then, with a reel, she strode forward.

"Oho!" she cried, "how's this, now? Where've I—(hic)—got to, eh? A nice house for Madge Marks to—to—to come into! Ho!—(hic)—again! Now, who—who're you—'re you?" pausing beside the Englishman, and looking him full in the face, her breath strongly perfumed by the bad whisky which she had swallowed.

Lord Hallison saw that she was drunk, and reckless; he knew who it was—the dare-devil Madge Marks—for he had seen her once before, in a similar condition. He flushed with anger at her unwelcome presence, and impudence in coming to his private apartments.

As he looked toward the door he beheld several domestics, men and women, who had followed Madge, not daring to interfere with her, and now stood at the entrance, watching to see what their master would do.

His actions surprised them. Hastily stepping forward, he banged the door in their faces, and, wheeling round upon Madge Marks, hissed, rather than asked:

"Miserable being! what brought you here? Do you know where you are? This is my house."

"Know wher' I am? I—(hic)—I don't know. May Satan catch me!—(hic)—where—where's Diego, eh? Where's he, I say?" assuming a manner both ludicrous and fierce.

The Englishman readily comprehended that trouble was imminent. It was unavoidable. He did not wish to call in the servants, and have them kick her from the house, because she might babble an important secret.

He left his position at the door, and advanced to a corner, near one of the windows, where he kept a heavy cane.

Madge Marks, though drunk, understood the movement; more—she felt that he would not hesitate to use the cane; more—she de-

termined to commence the attack herself, and she did so, by grasping the card-box on the table, and hurling it, with terrific force, at the head of the nobleman.

Her aim was a blind one. He dodged the missile, which passed out through the window, like a shot, where the lid of the box slipped off. The cards scattered in the air, and fell in a shower upon Detective Joseph Fleet, as he ascended the front steps, in answer to the note he had received from Lady Hallison Blair.

With a panther-like cry, a scream of a cornered beast, Madge Marks staggered toward Lord Blair, her great arms outstretched, her fists clinched like sledge-hammers; and in the same moment Doctor Gulick Brandt sprung to the Englishman's assistance.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TIGER IN A RAGE.

LORD HALLISON BLAIR met the headlong attack of the drunken Madge in a summary manner. Quick as a flash, his stout cane circled through the air, and, like a bar of iron, it came down upon her head—not true to his aim, however, as a sudden, involuntary movement on her part caused the stroke to fall upon the side of her skull, glancing thence to the shoulder, where it hit with a deadened sound; and, for a second, she tottered as if about to go down under the chastisement.

But, recovering herself, she again started at him, when the physician, from behind, threw his arms around her, pinioned her elbows, bent her head down, and called on Blair to assist.

Quite unexpectedly Madge Marks straightened up, shook her arms loose, and, by the motion, sent Doctor Gulick Brandt backward upon the floor.

Another blow from the cane, truer than the first, at this instant felled her, and, tripping over the prostrate form of the physician, she struck with such force as to fairly shake the room.

"Perdition!" exclaimed Blair, as he replaced the cane in the corner, "she is a perfect devil unchained! Now, what to do with her perplexes me."

"Curse her!" blurted Dr. Brandt, regaining his feet; "my bones are nearly all broken. She is as strong as an ox!"

"I could have warned you of that; but there was no time to advise in this case. She is helpless enough now. We have no other course than to keep her here. She will probably have to sleep off her intoxication, and we may have to put up with her disgusting presence until to-morrow. I think Diego will be here then, and he can take her away. Come, we'll put her on the sofa. The idea of having to handle such a thing. Ugh! I will have to get rid of the sofa after her dirty form being on it."

They raised the limp, heavy body of Madge Marks and placed it on a sofa.

"Who is she?" very naturally inquired the physician.

"An old hag, as you see—one among the hundreds who infest London. She lives with Diego Perez, in their miserable hovel, wherever it is, and, I suppose, gets her living by picking, stealing—throat-cutting, no doubt. Her nature is of that kind, and the Thames is convenient for such purposes. By-the-by, doctor, hurry down-stairs and gather up those cards she threw out of the window. If they should be found there, in the street, it would create unpleasant talk in the neighborhood."

The physician immediately quitted the apartment on this errand. When he gained the street, he looked about him on every side, but failed to discover any signs of the cards.

"Not there!" exclaimed Lord Hallison, surprisedly, when Gulick Brandt returned and reported a fruitless search; "why, where can they have gone to? Oh, perhaps some passer-by has already picked them up. Never mind; if they are not there at daylight I am satisfied. Eh? Listen. What is that hag saying in her drunken sleep?"

"You must not do it, Diego, I say! Ay, 'cospita' as much as you like—I have sworn you shall not do it. It is young Victor—hal ha! ha! you don't know who *he* may be! Ho! I know, though—I know who—who—he—he—"

"What is she talking about?" asked Brandt in a whisper.

The nobleman smiled. Incoherent as was her utterance—the above is only the substance—the few plainer-spoken syllables were readily comprehended by him; and he answered, in an undertone:

"I see through all this now. I know how she came to be drunk. Diego is cunning—but he has given me trouble in this instance."

"What is it, Lord Hallison? Explain."

"When Diego went from here this evening I judge he returned to his home, and she pumped his secret from him—his bargain with us. The probability is she has opposed him, and he, to get rid of her, has given her drink until she is intoxicated. I know she dislikes me; Diego has told me so. Why it is I know not. And by the words she dropped, I think she vowed to prevent his fulfillment of the bargain in regard to Victor Hassan. That is what I divine from her—Ah! Hear! She is chattering again."

"Hal hal hal!" she gutturally laughed, starting in a fresh strain. "You think to fool me. Just one, and no more. Only one drink. Hal! he's gone! Diego—Diego—come back! Don't kill him!"

"You see," said Blair, in an undertone. "Diego has eluded her, and gone to perform his task."

"Come back, Diego!" went on Madge Marks, as her brain, and lips, and lungs occupied themselves even in her drunken insensibility. "Oh, Diego! it may be the boy—it may be young Victor. Satan! he will go—and I am foiled! Curse you! If you knew it was the—the real son—the real son—who—"

"What is she saying?" and the Englishman leaned eagerly forward; for her last words seemed to interest him.

An unbroken quietness reigned; both listened for the next words to escape her swollen lips; but the latter were sealed in silence. She said not another word. For full twenty minutes they waited, but she spoke no more.

"Wake her, Lord Hallison," suggested Brandt, at the expiration of that time.

"Wake her? Oh, no; hardly! Do you imagine I am anxious for a repetition of her demonstrative hate? Let her alone, and she will sleep off the effects of the liquor. I only hope she may remain where she is till Diego comes again. Ayho! I am very sleepy. I propose to retire. We must do without our game of cards to-night."

"Will you leave her here?" pointing to Madge Marks.

"Oh, yes; as well here as anywhere. We can lock the door. When she recovers her senses, she will not injure anything."

"What if she should struggle up, and in the dark fall out of the window?"

"Hal hal! I half-hope such will be the case. Come. To bed." (Stretching wearily.) "I wonder how my pretty Pauline enjoyed her ride this afternoon? Hal! what's that?"

There was another sound of confusion in the hall below, and this time it was of a familiar kind. The front door banged; the servants were heard to flee precipitately before the comer; a heavy step ascended the stairs; a surly rumbling, grunting, growling, ejaculating became audible.

"It is Diego Perez!" at once exclaimed the nobleman. "Can he have performed his work so soon, and returned to receive the balance of his pay?"

With a jerk and a whiz, the door flew open and back, striking the wall with a clang, and the bull-fighter entered. His hat was gone; his cloak was missing; his appearance was strange; his bronzed features wore a disappointed look. They saw that he was displeased, that he was furious; his teeth gritted; his eyes snapped fiercely; his fists doubled and relaxed alternately; he snarled, looked wild, haggard, terrible—like a beast ready to devour, or like a giant ready to annihilate; his whole mien was calculated to impress one with the idea that a tiger, transformed to a man with bristling face, sinewy limbs, treacherous heart, was about to launch itself, roaring, biting, tearing, upon somebody or something, or anything, or everything.

Near the center of the room he halted abruptly and cast a glance upon the two men who were, for a second, speechless on beholding him in such a condition, such fury; for

his cheek blanched in the horrible fire of wrath which turmoiled and seethed within him.

"Well, Diego," spoke the Englishman interrogatively, "what does this mean?"

"Mean, my lord!—mean!" he roared, with voice of a hurricane, lungs of a lion. "Mean! Dios—and Dios again! You see me? Do you read me? Am I myself?—or do I picture a scarecrow in my look? 'Sdeath!—and the devil! I am only half come? I am here—but my life nearly paid for it, instead of that stripling's for whom I meant a knife-thrust!" and he rocked to and fro unrestedly.

"How, Diego?" and Lord Hallison Blair stepped up to him, also frowning, as he half-surmised his meaning; "have you failed?"

"Failed? No!" (with a scowl at Brandt.) "But I am balked. Balked. Do you understand that? Balked."

"Did you attempt the young man's life?"

"Yes," surlily.

"Did you succeed?"

"No; curse him!" hotly.

"Hal! then you did fail?"

"No, I did not fail!" fiercely: and he continued:

"I tell you I was balked. My knife was sharp; my arm was steady; my nerves were well braced; I had sworn to do the deed—then how could I fail? I was by his bedside; I was about to strike at his heart, when something struck me from behind, somebody pounced upon me; and more—they carried me down before I could fight. A pistol pressed my cheek; I tried to shake off my enemy, and—bahl! what use is all this? The young man lives. I am lucky in keeping my own life!"

"How unfortunate!"

"Ten thousand blasphemies! yes. I was tricked dirtily."

"And how happened this interferer in your plans so opportunely on the scene? Who was it? Do you know him?"

"Ay, Satan take him! well do I know him."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Joseph Fleet, of the Secret Service force of London, is in the parlor, and would see my lord without delay," at this juncture announced a servant, ere the bull-fighter could answer the nobleman's inquiry.

"*Cospita!*" exclaimed Diego; "the very man! It was he! He it was who foiled me!" and he glared upon the servant in a savage way, evidently astonished at hearing that the detective was in the house.

The reader will remember that, when Joe Fleet discovered Diego Perez operating on the lock of the door, he drew back into the space of another doorway near him and pulled off his boots. They had served him now admirably. One boot, with unerring aim, struck the Spaniard on the temple, and in a trice the detective was astride of Diego. He plioned him firmly down, placed a pistol against his shaggy head, and chuckled over the capture.

The noise aroused Victor Hassan; and, as the young man started from his couch, two doors on the opposite side of the room opened through which appeared Calvert Herndon and Simon Jeremiah Ebenezer Kraak, both considerably alarmed.

"Mr. Fleet, what on earth is this? What has happened? How came you here? Who is that man?"

"Well," answered the detective, coolly, "I came here on business. This rascal came to stick you with a knife. That's all. See it?—the knife. There it is on the floor yonder." Then, to his captive: "But you didn't do it—eh? You dog! I say you didn't do it. My name is Fleet—Joe Fleet. You know me? Have you ever heard of me? you devil! Thank me for this. I just came in time, didn't I? What do you think of yourself? you scoundrel!" poking Diego in the ribs, which called forth a deep growl, another oath, a snap of the massive jaws as they closed in a smothered imprecation.

The bull-fighter was taken at a weak point. With all his strength, with all his audacity, he was overpowered and powerless. His limbs and body were securely held, as if padlocked to the floor, by a man whose physical endurance and elasticity of frame were adequate to conquer his ugly antagonist.

"There! There! See now!" cried the ex-superintendent; "I told you so! Didn't I

say we'd have a hard time? Didn't my dream-book say that to dream of cards and the devil, meant trouble? Here it is! It's come! I knew it! Wait. I'll find it in my book and read it to you."

But the others paid him little heed. Their attention was directed to the bull-fighter and the detective.

"Let me up!" howled Diego, dismally, choking back the consuming chagrin and anger which teemed in his breast; "I am foiled in this—curse your coming! Then why keep me down here? Let me up; or, by his Holiness the Pope, I'll burst a vein at blaspheming!"

But he writhed in vain as he tried to release himself from that iron grip.

"Easy, now," admonished the detective. "You see, this pistol is loaded and cocked; so that, if you disturb the trigger, it will be apt to result in a promiscuous scatteration of your brains. Now, will you live or die? You can choose." Then, compressing his lips firmly: "Hark ye! I'll not be trifled with. Say so by action, and you can quit this world in a twinkling."

"Bahl! the world is a h—l. Yet, *here*, I am master of myself and many others. If I die—though my lot be a heaven, it would be a servile one. Wisely, I choose the world; for, in it, I have a certain reign. Otherwise I would become a slave. I must—"

"That'll do for you. I know you, Diego Perez—know you for a thief and a ruffian, and well deserving of the halter. Now, if I let you up, will you behave yourself and go with me?"

"Yes."

"First: who sent you here?"

"It is no business of yours."

"Tell me," continued Fleet, sternly, pressing the weapon closer against Diego's head.

"Lord Hallison Blair!" blurted the Spaniard after a moment's hesitation.

"Good! That's what I thought. Now you may get up," saying which, he released Diego, and the latter scrambled to his feet.

Ostensibly, the bull-fighter meant to keep his word, to accompany Joe Fleet. But the detective was blinded here.

No sooner was Diego Perez free than, stretching his limbs, twirling his arms, uttering a defiant snarl, he dashed toward a window opposite to where he stood.

Fleet endeavored to intercept him, but, failing in this, he fired the pistol—to no effect, as he judged; for, without reckoning upon the consequences, Diego sprung through the frame. There was a crash, a jingle of glass, and he disappeared.

Simultaneously they ran to the window and looked out. The darkness of the night obscured everything.

"Devils catch him!" muttered Joe Fleet, "he's escaped me after all, but he's my bird yet. I know his roost."

"What is the solution of this occurrence, Mr. Fleet?" interrogated Calvert Herndon, as he and the others turned to the detective for an explanation.

"That man is Diego Perez—once a Spanish bull-fighter, now a London rough, and a tool of Lord Blair's. He came here to kill you, young man (to Victor), but I prevented the catastrophe, as you see. It's all right, sir; I've seen her—your lady-love; that is, Lady Blair, I mean. All the same. Whole thing fixed shortly. Have yourself ready to come to me when I send for you. I don't know exactly when or where it will be. Be on the watch against assassins."

"You have seen Lady Blair?" interrupted Victor, anxious to hear of Pauline.

"Oh, yes. She's all right—perfectly well, I mean. Remember, and be on your guard. More anon. Hem! Good by, all."

Having drawn on his boots while speaking, he hurried from the room, from the hotel, along the street, turning, foot-hot, back toward Square St. James, leaving the trio to marvel over the occurrence which had very near cost Victor his life.

When Diego Perez launched himself out into the air from the window of Victor Hassan's room, he fully expected to be mangled in the fall. But he was desperate, and with him desperation smothered fear; he cared not, as long as he would by the lofty jump escape the detective and the prison-cell which had loomed in his vision.

Instead of striking, after a violent descent, upon stone, brick or dirt, and being crushed,

he suddenly alighted upon the roof of a dwelling without so much as spraining an ankle.

Looking about him, he soon found a trap-door, and he made his way through this to the interior of the building. The house was unoccupied. He continued down the stairs, clambered out at a side window, and entered the street. He was bareheaded—was without his cloak—but he, too, started in the direction of Square St. James, in a state of mind difficult to describe.

He reached the nobleman's house in advance of Joe Fleet; and now, upon hearing the detective announced, his wild rage cooled; he could not decide whether Fleet was in hound-like pursuit of him, or whether he had really come there on business with Lord Hallison Blair.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE INTERVIEW.

MOTIONING Diego to be quiet, Lord Hallison Blair turned to the man who waited at the door, and said, calmly:

"Show the visitor to my fencing-room. And mark—do not make any great haste about it. Delay a few minutes."

"Yes, my lord," and, as the servant withdrew, the nobleman continued, addressing the others:

"Both of you will come with me. You, Diego Perez, must secrete yourself, and, at the clapping of my hands, be ready to—"

"Well," prompted the Spaniard, "and think you I am dumb?—that I know not your meaning? I must be ready, at your say, and then—s-q-u-i-r!" with a twist of his fingers around the throat, and feeling for the small, sharp poniard he invariably carried in his bosom.

"No, Diego—not that. Simply knock him down—insensible—that's all. If your blow is hard enough to kill, why, we'll have to be satisfied. I will look to the rest," and the significant fire in his eyes was answered by a knowing leer on the part of the bull-fighter. "But, come," added Blair, "there is no time to lose, if we would reach the fencing-room before this rash comer. I fear a dangerous secret has leaked out. Maybe the detective has discovered something to injure us. Come."

The recumbent form of Madge Marks had, all along, escaped Diego's notice, and, as he followed after the two plotters, his eyes were ablaze, his only thought was of the opportunity about to present, in which he could turn the tables on the detective.

Madge was, therefore, left to herself, and, for the time, forgotten. Her drunken sleep was not destined to be of long duration; her action, upon awakening, was to be of considerable importance in the pending scenes of the night.

"Do you entertain any idea that we have been discovered, Lord Hallison?" inquired the physician, in a tremulous whisper, as they descended the stairs to the floor below.

"Discovered? Pshaw! what grounds could I have for any such imagination? Why, you are already turning white. You must do better than this, Gulick Brandt. If you pale and tremble when there is no cause, how will it be when you are arrested for placing the pastille beneath Calvert Herndon's nose? Beware! I advise you for your own welfare, when I say, guard your expression of face even closer than the words of your mouth; or, as sure as death, you'll bring destruction on yourself. Well, what now? Where are you going, sirrah?" the latter interrogatory speech to a serving-man who was ascending to the floor they had just left.

"I—I—I want to get something, my lord; hif you please, I—"

"But your place is in the hall. You have no business up here."

"Hif you please, your lordship, Jeems dropped his kerchief when he's comin' back from a-tellin' you of the vis'tor down-stairs, an' e asked me to get it for 'im, sir, my lord—that's it," bowing low before his exacting master.

Blair eyed the fellow sharply for a second, and then continued on, without comment upon this plausible excuse. Diego snarled, and frowned darkly upon the servant, who made haste to depart.

The Englishman had been lied to by his employee. The latter's real mission was to the apartments of Lady Blair, and he carried a note, under command of strictest secrecy, which contained the following:

"All right. Young man safe. No danger. JOE FLEET."

The fencing-room was a square apartment, with high ceiling, matted floor and smooth, white walls, against which were hung, on spikes, nails, pins and knobs, various arms of numerous patterns and elaborate finish.

There were knives, poniards, rapiers, broad-swords, pistols, hunting-rifles, game-bags, shot and bullet pouches, powder-horns and trumpets; foils, masks, gloves, leggings, arm shields, boxing-gloves, costumes for the chase, riding-whips, spurs—all these, suspended, with taste, in appropriate sections and convenient positions—showing that he, Blair, was fond of boxing, fencing, hunting, riding, chasing, yet only an amateur, with small reputation in either line—his forte being the table with the green baize and metal card-box, or roulette, or cards; or, in fine, anything for money, wherein defrauding and mental cunning were applicable.

Near the door was an iron plate—such an one as is in use in our shooting-galleries—at which to discharge a pistol, in practicing—and behind this the bull-fighter secreted himself, check-reining his eagerness to deal a foul blow at the one who had so successfully thwarted him at the — Hotel.

Joseph Fleet was soon ushered into their presence, and he entered, saluting them politely, which salutation was stiffly acknowledged by the Englishman. Brandt neither bowed nor spoke—he was beginning to tremble; for, with the first glance into the detective's eyes, he fancied he saw there something threatening, and he remained silent, dreading he knew not what, almost ready to cry out in despair, as he imagined that Fleet had discovered their villainy, and had come to arrest them.

"Take a seat, sir," Blair said. "You have important business with me, I presume, that you should call at this hour—it is growing late."

"Yes—business. Were you going to bed? Sorry," was the detective's indifferent reply, as he dropped into a chair.

"Be kind enough to state your business at once, then," pursued the nobleman.

"In a hurry? Oh—well—" Joe Fleet laid the forefinger of his right hand in the palm of his left, as if about to explain a problem in algebra:

"You see, fact is, Lord Blair, business is business, at all hours—either day or night. Makes no difference to me, if you'd been in bed; you would have got up, of course. Sorry—I am—to intrude, but there's something I want to know—something that you alone can tell me—and something I am determined to get at. Understand? I say determined. I am an emissary of the law—a spy, an explorer at large, in the Secret Service, and so forth. See?"

"Pray you, proceed."

"I will. 'Tisn't often that my calling brings me in contact with any of the nobility. In fact, I've never had a case among any of the noblemen of England since I received my commission—not insinuating that the characters of some don't need investigation. But, as I said before, business is business—and on business I've come here, to see you, and that man, there—Brandt, I believe his name is," and, as he turned from one to the other of his hearers, fixing that steady, sharp, analytical gaze on each, alternately, the physician's nervousness increased, though he strove to conceal it.

After a momentary pause, he went on:

"The question I shall propound must be answered promptly, satisfactorily, or I shall be obliged to resort to more persuasive measures than mere polite inquiry. Understand? It is this: Why did you wish Lord Victor Hassan Blair removed from this world to the next, eh? Why did you bargain with a base-born assassin, named Diego Perez, to murder him, eh? What is your excuse for it? Now, don't tell me it was because you feared he would claim and get, by right of lawful heritage, the position you usurp; for I know that already. But, tell me what other motive you had. See? I'm as sharp as a swordfish, keen as the back of a dolphin, on which no-

body could ride without a saddle, poets' assertions to the contrary, notwithstanding. What did you want young Hassan killed for?"

Blair started and paled; Brandt trembled; Diego, in his concealment, grew red with pent-up rage.

"Answer me, Lord Hallison Blair," closely pursued the detective, as he saw that the Englishman hesitated; why did you bribe a ruffian to kill Lord Victor Hassan Blair, the true son, and only surviving relative of Lord Harold, Earl of —, whose position you disgrace? Queer that I know so much, isn't it?"

Lord Victor Hassan Blair! The "B." did, then, signify Blair? Victor had discovered his claim to the title!

The words of Joe Fleet rung in the nobleman's ears, sunk like fire into his brain. He must have seen Victor Hassan! The young man must have acquainted him with the attempt made upon his life in America! What was pending? A crisis, a *denouement*, in which he, Blair, would become prey to an avenging law!

The above flashed across the Englishman's mind, and while the pallor on his handsome face assumed a whiter hue, he, too, with all his reckless nature, indifference to every situation, boasted promptness to deal with any emergency, grew ill at ease under this plain speech, which indicated that the speaker was thoroughly familiar with the matter in hand.

Gulick Brandt could scarce smother the groan which arose to his lips. The atmosphere seemed, to him, to be growing chilly, disagreeable; a creeping sensation came over him.

"I do not understand you, sir. What is the meaning of this enigmatical strain?" Blair mustered strength to say and ask.

"Oh, you can't comprehend? Listen. Now, I know exactly what I'm about. Just come from the hotel, from the young man on whom your hired ruffian was about to practice his knife-tricks. I happened to be there in time to prevent a murder. See? I half captured the assassin—rascal—had him and he got away—"

"Did he tell you?" sputtered Brandt, in a broken, hesitating way; for which utterance, Blair could have throttled him, and at which Fleet smiled, as he answered:

"Partly. He told me— But, never mind, I know all about it. I always get at such things in the nick of time. The Spaniard was to receive one hundred pounds for his little job—and I have gleaned a variety of other particulars from different sources. Come, own up. More—tell me *why* you wanted Victor Hassan murdered?"

"There—there must be some great mistake. I do not, at all, understand this rigmorole," stammered the nobleman, but it was in well-affected surprise.

"Now, look here," reasoned the detective, argumentatively and emphatically; "I have eyes, and I have ears. I have seen, and I have heard. Seeing and hearing is believing, and consequently you can't blink me by tomfoolery. As long as you won't answer my questions straightforwardly, as long as you won't give me any satisfaction, I'll create a focus by stating why I am here. I, Joe Fleet, legally authorized deputy of justice in the Secret Service force of London—thanks to the favor of Her Majesty—do pronounce you under arrest for having bribed one Diego Perez to murder, in cold blood, a young man, whose name is Victor Hassan, who is the rightful claimant to the title and estates of the late Lord Harold, Earl of —. Further, for having attempted this young man's life on a former occasion, in America. More, for having buried alive one Calvert Herndon, with the assistance of your associate rascal there, Doctor Gulick Brandt. More yet, on suspicion of having persuaded into wedlock, through misrepresentation and fraud, the daughter of said Calvert Herndon. And, to wind the matter up, add my opinion of you, which is, that you are a villain at large, a gamester, a trickster, a man who can espouse, first, the Tory party, then the Whig, then the Tory again, and kill conscience in the furtherance of every dirty triumph. Plain talk, isn't it? Makes you wince, doesn't it? Joe Fleet, I am! So, come along. Business, this is, arising and pointing toward the door.

A bent, crouching form was moving noiselessly behind the detective, gradually approaching nearer; a great fist was doubled and clinched till the nails fairly sunk into the hard flesh; a pair of glittering eyes were fixed, without a quaver, upon the intended and unconscious victim.

At this critical juncture, there was a rap at the door, and a voice outside said:

"Lady Blair would see my lord in her rooms immediately."

"I cannot come. Bear that message to her," quickly answered Blair, fearful that Fleet would turn and ascertain the danger hovering over him.

"Come, my lord, you are my prisoner in the name of the law. Will you go peaceably, or must I use force? Business is business. Come."

"It shall be neither!" cried the Englishman, losing all control over himself, in the feeling of triumph, which he experienced upon marking that Diego was ready to strike. "Perdition catch you for a meddling fool! You have sealed your doom by coming here!" He clapped his hands; there was a growl, and Fleet, with a groan, sunk to the floor.

Diego Perez had felled him as a butcher does the helpless ox, and now stood glowering down upon the still, motionless body, laughing gutturally, entirely forgetting his recent passion in the present moment of apparently perfect triumph.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Brandt, hoping it had been a death-blow.

"Well done, Diego; well done. You shall have another fifty pounds for this!"

"Then I am satisfied," returned the bull-fighter, subsiding to his habitual hang-dog manner. "And, now, you shall pay me fifty more to take him from the house—"

"Hal! See—he bleeds," interrupted Lord Hallison, pointing to their victim, from whose bruised temples tiny drops of blood were trickling down to the carpet.

"So be it," was Diego's comment. "Let him bleed. If I had but used my knife, he would be bleeding faster."

He was interrupted again. This time by a second tapping upon the door-panel, and the servant who had knocked before, now said:

"Lady Blair requests me to say that, if my lord would not incur her displeasure, he will come at once."

"Tell her I will come at once," Blair replied, in a pet of impatience; then to the others: "I must go. Fiends take her at this time! She will come here, if I do not attend her. You can return to the room up-stairs, while I see what my charming wife wants of me. Let this miserable carcass remain here until I am released from the interview with Lady Blair. I shall not be long, depend upon it. Come."

The trio quitted the room, turning the key, and leaving it in the lock.

Lord Hallison Blair sought his wife; and the physician, with Diego Perez, repaired to the room where they had left Madge Marks.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WOMAN'S ANGER.

LORD HALLISON BLAIR found his wife standing in the center of the boudoir, gazing toward the door through which he entered. Her perfect form was drawn up to its fullest height, her lustrous eyes sparkled with a purer brilliancy than ever before marked by him.

"Well, my lord," said Pauline, regarding him steadily, "you have condescended to come at last."

"Excuse my delay, love; it was impossible sooner. I was very busy."

He smiled. His manner was studiously collected; no trace of his late excitement the least visible.

"Busy? At what villainy now?" she asked, quickly.

"Villainy?" he repeated, in astonishment; "what do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that I at last understand your base nature—your vile hypocrisy. You have long and successfully deceived me. Contemptible as I have always believed you to be, I never imagined your real wickedness—"

"Woman—Lady Blair—Pauline," he interrupted, "what is all this?"

"What is it? It is to strip the mask from your face; but, I sent to you now for the purpose of demanding to know why you bribed a man to kill Victor Hassan? Tell me, Lord Hallison, for I have ascertained all!" and she took a step forward, riveting her bright eyes even more searchingly upon him, while a crimson flush supplanted the delicate bloom of her youth.

He drew back and stood gazing at her while he thought.

"Tell me," continued Pauline, interrogatively, "what your object was in wishing Victor Hassan murdered? I overheard the whole conversation between you and the wretch who was bought by your gold. I dispatched a note to the headquarters of the London police, summoning a detective, to whom I gave all the information I possessed; and who, through a merciful Providence, was enabled to thwart your designs. Speak, sir, speak; for I am aroused! The dislike that has ever dwelt in my bosom for you, even in the hour when my lips answered 'Yes' at the marriage altar, has turned to bitter hate. Since I know you as you are, even toleration is impossible! I would drag you to the halls of justice. Speak, if you have voice!"

Her bosom rose and fell with the power of her stormy feelings; she stood before him as an accusing angel.

The Englishman's eyes lost their mildness and assumed a scintillating stare; which, could she have read its meaning, would have warned her of a devilish flame fast kindling in his heart.

"Have a care, Lady Blair!" he hissed, through his pearly, tight locked teeth. "You are at something dangerous! This accusation is false. You—"

"No! It is not false, but true!—true! Oh! coward that you are! A man that you fear to meet yourself, you hire others to attack! You are a treacherous serpent, Lord Hallison Blair, and I have found you out. I shall expose you before noon to-morrow! This tool of yours shall be found, and compelled to testify against you. Tremble! Justice shall overtake you sooner than you had imagined. If I were a man I would drag you from this house to a prison cell! I hate you! I hate you! Villain, I despise you!" and her fixed gaze seemed to burn upon the very core of his heart.

This was a reception he had not anticipated.

Casting aside all restraint, Lord Hallison Blair sprang forward, crying hoarsely:

"I must kill you! You know too much! You shall die!" and he grasped her, apparently set upon this horrible performance.

A piercing scream rung from her lips; she struggled in his tenacious hold.

At that instant there was a loud rapping at the door, and the voice of Brandt said, hurriedly.

"Lord Hallison, come here—quick! Come here!"

"What do you want?" huskily inquired Blair, still retaining one arm around Pauline, who had fainted, and clutching her fair throat the tighter.

"Come quick, Lord Hallison! Madge Marks is gone—"

"Curse her! What do I care? Do you come in here and help me. Hurry!"

The physician appeared, and as he did so, there was a stifled exclamation of horror from the opposite side of the room, where stood Pauline's waiting-maid, who, alarmed at her mistress's shriek, had hastened to see what was the matter.

"Seize that girl! Seize her!" cried the nobleman; and Brandt, only comprehending that immediate action was necessary, leaped to the maid, secured her, and clapped a hand over her mouth ere he realized the state of things.

"You are strangling her, Lord Hallison!" he exclaimed, as he saw the deadly grip in which Pauline was held. "Don't kill her! What's the matter?"

Seeming to have changed his mind through a sudden idea, rather than being influenced by Gulick Brandt, Hallison Blair released Pauline's throat, and lifting her unconscious form in his arms, made toward the door, saying:

"Wait till I come back—wait for me here. Don't let that girl escape you."

He left the room and walked rapidly along the entry with his burden. Then, with a crook and a turn, he continued through a side passage, leading by a spiral staircase to the top of the house. Arrived at the upper landing, he opened the door to still another entry, narrow, long, low; passing thence to a small room, secluded from the main portion of the mansion, into which he carried his wife. Placing her upon a sofa, he departed hastily, having first taken the precaution to turn the key in the lock. On leaving the by-passage, had he turned his head, he would have discovered a tall form, intently silent, with eyes bent upon him, and mouth drawn in a significant smile. It was Madge Marks. Her sleep had ended abruptly as it had come upon her. Arising from the lounge in the room where she had been stricken down insensible, she glanced about her in surprise, but soon remembered all.

"Here is no place for me," she resolved. "I must leave quickly. Devils and fiends! Diego foiled me in getting me to drink! It shall not be so again. When there is business—then no liquor. I swear it!" She stole silently from the room.

As she was about to advance to the stairs, she heard persons ascending; and, to avoid an encounter, she fled noiselessly in the opposite direction, concealing herself in an alcove at the further end of the hall.

Two men entered the room she had just left; one kept on, halting before a door near her, and disappearing inside. The latter she recognized as Lord Blair.

Prompted by curiosity, she went to the door, and listened attentively to what passed between the husband and wife.

She chuckled with satisfaction as she drank in every word of Pauline's indignant outburst. She was aroused from her eaves-dropping by the approach of Brandt, and had barely time to regain her concealment when the physician paused at the same door.

Then came a scream; Brandt cried out that Madge Marks was gone; and in the same moment, he, too, disappeared into the room.

Presently the door opened; Blair came out, carrying Pauline; and Madge Marks followed after him like a specter.

Lord Blair returned to find the physician as he had left him—still holding the terrified girl, who trembled as her master re-entered the boudoir.

"Mark me," he said, advancing, and addressing her sternly; "if you do not wish to die, you will be quiet."

She clasped her hands imploringly, but could not speak, so firmly did the physician press his hand across her mouth.

"Let her go, doctor."

When Brandt released her, she sunk upon her knees, and wept:

"Oh, tell me, my lord—what have you done with my mistress? Where is she? Oh! oh! you have killed her! you have killed her!" and hiding her face in her apron, she burst forth in a tempest of hysterical sobs.

"Silence, girl," commanded the Englishman. "Your mistress is safe enough. She is unharmed. But heed what I say;" (taking her wrist, and closing his fingers over it till she suffered intense pain); "if you dare slip one hint of what you have seen or heard, I will certainly kill you, as I meant to kill her! Do you understand me?"

"Oh! yes, yes; if you tell me she is safe, indeed, I will say nothing. I will keep silent; I will never let anybody know—you are hurting me, my lord. Please let go my wrist."

"Remember," he admonished, hissing, threateningly. "If you tell any one, your doom is sealed! Now go!" and she fled from the room.

"What have you done with your wife—Pauline?" asked the doctor.

"Never mind her. I will attend to her. Come, we must look to the detective."

They returned to where Diego awaited them, and the three started for the fencing-room.

"You owe me fifty pounds, my lord. Remember that," said the bull-fighter, as they moved away.

"Yes, Diego," Blair assented, "and fifty

more when you get the body afloat in the Thames."

"Good. I thought it."

When they reached the room where they had left Joe Fleet lying on the floor, apparently lifeless, judge of their astonishment, upon opening the door, at discovering—nothing!

He was gone!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOE FLEET DEFINES HIS POSITION.

SCARCE five minutes had elapsed after the departure of his would-be assassins, when consciousness began to assert its sway; and gradually the detective recovered from the effect of Diego's dreadful blow. He sprang to his feet and gazed about him bewilderedly. Then he advanced and tried the door-knob, to find that he was securely fastened in. But, as he turned again to the center of the apartment, he smiled complacently as he took out his diary and scribbled hastily on a loose sheet:

"Send *posse* of police to St. James Square. House of Lord Blair. Hurry up! Devil to pay!"

JOE FLEET.

"That'll fix *that*!" tearing out another leaf and writing as follows:

"Come to St. James Square. House of Lord Blair. Hurry! You must come! Devil to pay in full!"

JOE FLEET.

"And that'll do for *that*! Now, then, my worthy lord, we'll see who plays trump on this trick. 'Um! Can't beat me! can't do it! I'm Joe Fleet, I am!'"

Crossing over to the window, he raised the sash, and, leaning out, blew a shrill whistle.

In a few moments two policemen met, running, on the pavement directly beneath him.

"Here!" called the detective, who could but faintly distinguish their outlines in the gloom, "it's me—Joe Fleet—Secret Service—here's a note. Take it to the nearest station! Be quick! Watch for it!" and letting fall the first note, it fluttered lightly to their feet.

"Here's another," he continued, casting out the second slip. "Take that to the Hotel. Ask for Mr. Hassan—give it to him. Be quick, now! I'm a prisoner. Cut-throats and assassins up here! *Run!*" and as they hurried off, the detective left the window. Folding his arms, he paced to and fro, muttering, with sarcasm:

"The villains! Try to kill me, eh? Me!—Joe Fleet!—detective!—Secret Service of London! 'Um! very good! I'll be even with them. There's another pickle for 'em to suck. Oh! *won't* there be a mess when Messrs. Blair and Brandt find me alive and kicking, and lots of police on hand? Ha!"

He paused and listened. Some one was coming toward the fencing-room. Close at hand was the iron image which had served Diego Perez. In a twinkling he had whisked himself behind this, and none too soon; for he was scarce out of sight when the door opened, and the noble, the physician, and the bull-fighter entered.

"He's gone! Lord Hallison! He's gone! We are undone!"

"Silence, doctor; you are a fool!" ordered Blair, sternly; though his own amazement at not finding the detective was not without its suggestions of fresh troubles.

"What do you make of this strange disappearance, Diego?"

"Do I not see, like you, that he is gone? What more is there? Am I a magician, that I can tell wonders where other men marvel?"

Advancing further into the room, Blair overturned a heap of coats and leggings in one corner, as if he expected to find the detective hidden there. Then he turned to the image, and was about to look behind it, when a sound of tramping feet and murmuring voices fell upon his ear.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, under his breath, turning to Diego Perez.

"*Dios!*" surlily returned the Spaniard, "why do you aim questions at me? I know not. Here comes one who may tell."

As he spoke, a coming footstep was heard in the hall without, and a servant, panting for breath, dashed in among them.

"What is the meaning of this, sirrah? Why this disturbance below?" demanded Lord Blair.

"D-d-d-hif you please, m-m-my lord, the hall's full of coves who-who-who w-w-w-want you, my lord! Police! 'ere they hare, a-comin' up 'ere, my lord," and he was distorted with shivering and shaking.

The Englishman paled. Gulick Brandt's face turned white as a sheet. Diego Perez scowled and ground his teeth.

"Back! Back to the hall!" cried Lord Blair, "and say your master offers twenty pounds to every man who will defend this house and me against the intruders!" Then to the physician, "We are caged. You must fight. Get a sword—quick!" and he snatched a light saber from its hook, while a savage, defiant gleam lighted his dark, serpent eyes.

"Hit's too late, my lord! Hit's too late!" brokenly ejaculated the servant; "'ere they be a-comin' now—oh!"

The confusion of sounds had now ascended the main stairway; the stamp, clatter and shuffle of numerous feet drew closer along the entry.

Driven to it by force of his perilous situation, Brandt armed himself with a rapier, and took a stand beside Hallison Blair.

Diego Perez tore a broadsword from the wall, and giving utterance to a roar like an enraged bull, bounded toward the stairway.

As he did so, a number of servants crowded in, keeping him back like a solid wall, and in vain he threw himself against them in a mad effort to break through.

The Spaniard's object was to get out and off. He cared little what became of his two companions after that; but finding his way blocked, he fairly howled, and forced his way through, only to be confronted by the law deputies.

"It's the Spaniard! seize him!"

Then began a struggle. The bull-fighter was well known to those who faced him as a desperate character, and one for whose arrest the authorities had frequently given order. They attacked him with their batons, and he fought and raved, circling the bright steel about his head with lightning quickness and furious strength; but his fierce resistance amounted to naught. Wherever he struck there seemed to be a dozen batons ready to receive and turn the blow; and with every stroke a dozen batons bruised him in a dozen different parts, until, bruised and bloody, he tottered back into the fencing-room; the sword fell from his grip; he sunk to the floor, exhausted, to be immediately seized and bound.

Headed by their sergeant, the policemen filed in on one side of the apartment, while the wondering, trembling servants shrunk before them.

Blair leaped to the iron plate, and, placing his back against it, brought his weapon to a guard. In this action he was imitated by Gulick Brandt.

"Back!" cried the former; "back, I say. If you court death, then come on. The first who approaches me dies. I will slay you all sooner than be taken. Back! You dare not lay a hand on me—"

A form whipped around the iron target; the saber was knocked from the Englishman's hand; a strong grip was fastened on his collar, and Joe Fleet, in a voice of tantalizing calmness, said:

"Can't, eh? Nobody lay a hand on you? Mistaken. See? I've got you *tight!* Now, don't by any means allow yourself to become excited, my lord. It's unhealthy even for the nobility. Joe Fleet, I am."

Lord Hallison Blair glared upon the detective, and nearly choked in discomfiture as he thus found himself overpowered in an instant by the man he had considered his victim.

Gulick Brandt, with a wail, let fall his rapier, and offered no resistance when strong hands were laid upon him.

"Here's somebody that'll make you feel bad—rogue!" continued Fleet, slightly shaking the nobleman, and he pointed to Victor Hassan, who at that moment entered followed by Calvert Herndon.

At sight of the latter, Blair gazed as one who doubts his vision. Gulick Brandt tottered and fell in a faint.

Joe Fleet was evidently well pleased with "the situation."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A RED TABLEAU.

WITH face of ashen hue, the now thoroughly cowed Lord Blair turned to Calvert Herndon and gasped:

"You—you are alive!"

"Ay," returned the merchant, sternly, solemnly; "alive, and come to confound you, miserable wretch! justice demands that you be delivered up. The injured victims to your inhuman plottings await to see you punished. Are you prepared to render an account to the Supreme Being for your wickedness? Oh, villain—"

"Mercy!" fell from the nobleman's lips, in an involuntary breath, his hitherto strong spirit now completely broken down.

"Mercy!" repeated Victor, gazing fixedly at his enemy; "mercy? You ask mercy at our hands! Had you mercy for us?—for me, when you tore from me a cherished idol, and would have blasted my whole existence? You strive to brutally murder two persons, and blight the hopes of a third, and yet cry for mercy! In the hour of your downfall you cringe before your fellow-men, and, with lips that never knew a prayer, but rather given to the defilement of Holy Writ, crave pardon! Ask pardon of your God! it is not ours to grant. Where is Pauline?"

Before Blair could reply, the moment's silence was broken by a howl, as Diego Perez, who had wrung his arms from the hold of his captors, though not extricated them from their bonds, darted from the room.

"Quick, Madge Marks—cut these ropes! My knife is in my bosom. *Quick!*"

In a second the ropes were sundered; and none too soon, for two policemen were upon him, their batons raised to strike.

With a yell, he swung his great arm aloft. Crash! came his huge fist between the eyes of the foremost, and, ere the second could act, Diego was gone down the passage.

"Answer my question, Lord Hallison Blair," pursued Victor, advancing; "where is Pauline?"

"Yes, where is she?" screamed a cracked voice at the door, and Madge Marks stood before them with a glare of hatred fixed upon Hallison Blair.

"She is here!" immediately cried another voice, and Pauline ran from behind the hag. Two men exclaimed joyfully at her appearance; one man, even in his despair and chagrin, shot a baleful, fiery glance at those now reunited.

Pauline seemed not to notice her wicked husband: all others, save one, were lost in that riveted gaze which fastened upon Calvert Herndon. Her beautiful brown eyes widened, her breath seemed checked as she beheld her father, like an apparition from the grave, holding out his arms to receive her.

"Pauline! Pauline, my child!"

"Father! father!"

All doubts were at rest, and in another moment she was nestling to that parental breast.

Victor, despite the consideration that she was the wife of another, instinctively clasped her to his breast.

"Come," said Fleet, addressing the sergeant in a business tone, "take these rascals away. My Lord Blair says he'll go peaceably—"

"He's not a lord!" screamed Madge Marks, shrilly; "he's a low-born villain! He's my nephew! He's the son of my sister, Sarah Marks. Her husband's name was Gregor—his name's Hallison Gregor!"

When Madge entered the room, a policeman had instantly seized her, and as she thus spoke, he shook her roughly, saying:

"Silence, hag!"

"I will not," she persisted. "I know him well. He's my nephew. I took the true son of Earl Harold to America many years ago. This man is only Hallison Gregor, my sister's child."

"Ha!" exclaimed Victor, stepping to her side. "you knew Victor Hassan in his fancy? Do you know this, woman?" baring his arm, and holding up to her view the coat-of-arms of Blair, with the name.

For a moment she gazed upon the device; for a moment she bent a close scrutiny upon his features; then she cried:

"It is he! You are Victor! You—"

She was interrupted by the detective, who, having been noting attentively what she said, now enjoined upon the man who held her:

"Keep her tight. Important witness *she* is. Good! Everything goes on nicely. How do you like it, Lord Hal—"

Blair was no longer at his side, and he whirled around to discover the Englishman in the act of committing suicide.

He had snatched up the fallen sword, springing backward out of Fleet's reach; the hilt was against the floor, the point at his breast. Before a hand could stay him he threw himself upon the weapon; the sharp blade pierced his heart, and without a groan or a cry, he sunk lifeless at their feet.

"Bad—very bad *that!*" commented the detective as a murmur of horror rose simultaneously on all sides. "Cheated the law, after all. I— Eh? Hold him! Stop him! Catch him!"

The latter exclamations were called forth by a sudden commotion created by Gulick Brandt, who, half-mad with desperation, had broken loose and dashed off in the confusion.

He was pursued, but managed to escape from the house, and that was the last ever seen or heard of him. What became of him after that night is a problem that even Joe Fleet never could solve.

He was sorry, was disappointed at this unlooked-for turn. He had anticipated a rare case in the courts, as a result of the *ex-posed* in which he had figured; when, here, everything was quite spoiled through one of his prisoners having committed suicide, and the others having effected their escape.

The officers were dismissed, but Fleet remained to attend to matters.

Pauline, with her father and Victor, retired to a private parlor, where they could enjoy, in privacy, the emotions incident to their blissful reunion—blissful even with the shadow of wrong and death over that household.

Fleet joined them shortly, and tendered his congratulations, inquiring at the same time if they had decided upon a course.

"Can we not go back again to America, dear father?" suggested Pauline.

"But, what of Victor, my child?" replied the merchant, glancing at the young man. "He has a title to receive—a position to fill in England."

"Title, father?"

It was then she learned of Victor what the reader already knows; ascertained that *he*, instead of the man who had been her husband, was the son of the deceased Earl Harold, and sole heir to the titles of that nobleman.

"But I care little, if at all, for either title or estate now, Mr. Herndon," said Victor, gazing lovingly at Pauline; "Pauline is released to me, and I am possessed of unrivaled wealth in her love."

"Well," interposed Fleet, "I express my opinion that you'd all best 'go to roost.' It's late—very late. To-morrow you can arrange matters to suit yourselves."

"Mr. Fleet—" began Victor, as he was about to go.

"Joe Fleet, if you please," interrupted the detective.

"I must thank you for the great, great service you have rendered me. I owe you my life, and—"

"There! That'll do. Go to bed. Go to sleep. Get some rest, sir, get some rest. Clear your brain for the debate to-morrow. I've got something to look after before morning. Good night." And as Victor, bidding him good-night, passed out at the door, he continued: "Um! I'm glad of this. Half expected they'd sit up all night! Very sensible *they* are. Now! I'll see if the servants have attended to defunct Blair, and then to the private papers, etc., to see what I can find. I want to know *how* Gulick Brandt got into the position of executor, after Herndon destroyed the will to that effect, as I have been informed was the case. I'll see. Got an idea."

He went to the fencing-room, and seeing that everything had been properly attended to, first dispatched a servant for the undertaker, and then proceeded to carry out the idea he had conceived.

As Detective Joseph Fleet ascended the

stairs to the floor on which were the sleeping apartments of the late Hallison Gregor, a distant bell chimed forth upon the still air, denoting the hour of two, and as the clear notes echoed four strokes, Fleet mused:

"Two o'clock—and an echo, which is two more. Twice two are four, and now I will explore. So—thus slowly drags the night, and all is quiet."

CHAPTER XXX.

HOME AGAIN!

Two months later! The day was fine, the wind fair, and a steady breeze filled the white canvas of a noble vessel as it steered seaward, bound for that haven for true hearts and warm souls—*America*.

She bore upon her neat decks five passengers, who have figured as important characters in our narrative, viz.: Calvert Herndon and Pauline—the widowed Lady Blair—Victor, Hassan S. J. E. Kraak, and Pauline's former waiting-maid, Kate.

It had been decided that Victor should not advance his claim to the lordly title of the deceased Earl of —; the young man being doubly persuaded by the merchant, who promised ample income for his daughter and her husband, for a brilliant wedding was to take place immediately upon their arrival in New York.

The lawyers, who had promised themselves an interesting court proceeding, were somewhat disappointed on ascertaining the altered intentions of their client; but a liberal fee sufficed to pay them for what small trouble they had already been at, to procure the restoration of the papers in their possession, and to insure their silence in regard to the matter. Thus the proposed testimony of the ex-superintendent and Kate was done away with.

Their future was, however, fully provided for; Kraak being appointed to a pleasant position in Herndon's house, and Kate once more waiting upon her beloved mistress, Pauline.

Of course the widow of deceased Lord Blair duly received her portion.

Joe Fleet had been well rewarded, and had given promise to hush the rather tragical romance to the extent of his ability. But just sufficient leaked out, as is generally the case, to create a sensational gossip, which was augmented by the sudden departure of Lady Blair from London.

The sensation created by the advent of Calvert Herndon, after so many had seen him consigned to the tomb, is another point upon which the reader must give his, or her, imagination play.

The callers at the Home Mansion, when it was again thrown open to life and gaiety, were numerous, and rumor, like a rolling snowball, grew in bulk as it spread about.

The merchant was overrun with visitors, whose curiosity made them eager to know by what miracle he had, as it were, arisen from the grave.

Madge Marks was liberated by the London authorities, after obtaining from her much important testimony, but on condition that she would leave the city immediately. This she complied with, and we take it for granted that Diego Perez went with her; for neither was seen again about their favorite haunts, and, among others, Joe Fleet was glad of the riddance.

A lovely night—the first snow of winter Houses, trees, bushes and ground are clothed with the soft, pure mantle of flaky white, which, though unlike the blooming and refreshing luxury of springtime, that adorns nature in sublime majesty and inspiring grandeur, is not without a charm.

The air is hushed—but hark! there's music sounding. It seems smothered in a distant place, yet distinct, and floating to the ear in gentle cadence. A glaring blaze of light falls from the windows of the Home Mansion upon the glittering crust without, and forms are fitting to and fro in the mazy dance.

A jingle of sleigh-bells sounds on the road; gay laughter of ladies and gentlemen drowns the strains from violin and flute, and another party has arrived to participate in the festivities.

Here we pause, hoping that the joy inaugurated on that happy evening, when the parlors thronged with well-wishing guests, lasted, without a mar, through earthly life, and away

"—health and innocence
Transport the eye, the soul, the sense."

THE END.

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